Adventure

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Adventure

August 18, 1918
Vol. 18 No. 4

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FIRST SEPTEMBER ADVENTURE

Adventure

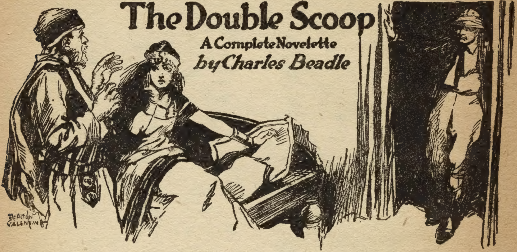
August 18, 1918

Vol. 18 No. 4

The Double Scoop

A Complete Novelette

by Charles Beadle



Author of "The Idol of 'It,'" "John O'Damn," etc.

CHAPTER I

May he who coldly scoffs at pangs of love
Be straight enamored of yon lark above:
May he, despairing, see her gaily rise,
To mock his hopeless passion from the skies.
—*Sidi Hammo.*

FROM the cool of the old-fashioned arch of Wine Office Court a tall young man plunged into the stream swirling down Fleet Street. At the Law Courts he glanced up at the clock and came to an irresolute halt by the curbstone. As he stared idly a girl popped out from behind a taxicab and proceeded to cross the road.

She was of medium height, dark as a Spaniard and walked with the self-reliant swing of the American woman. A cream soft hat, devoid of any decoration save a dark tassel, and her loose Holland costume gave her a cool capable appearance. She saw him when half-way across the road, acknowledged his salute and changed her course as a taxi came whirring up behind her.

He started forward in alarm as the machine bore down upon her, hooting dismally. She glanced over her shoulder as if measuring the distance and increased her pace by a fraction. The cab shot by her with scarcely a foot to spare. He had stepped back on to the pavement hurriedly, sheepishly. She looked up as she held out her hand, her large eyes observing him amusedly, and remarked—

"Well, what's the news?"

"Oh, nothing certain."

"Well, come and have tea with me?" She moved on, leaving him to overtake her in a stride.

"Yes, I'll take you to tea, Miriam."

She glanced at him.

"But 'nobody asked you, sir, she said!' "

"Well, of course it comes to the same thing," he retorted.

"Nothing of the sort! I asked you to tea with me. Don't start that idiotic argument all over again."

"But—but—it's—I've told you; I can't let a girl pay——"

"Rubbish; you're too English! You'd better tea by yourself." He hesitated, frowning.

She looked up at him with a laugh; then her lips tightened.

"It isn't the fact of the things; it's the principle."

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"Yes, I know," he said as they turned toward a tea-room in the cool quietude of Clifford's Inn. "You've explained that fact most lucidly, but all the same——"

"You think that because you're a man," she caught him up, "that it's an insult to your dignity. Rubbish!"

"As a matter of fact," she began again as soon as they were seated and had ordered tea, "you have an idea that it is symbolical of the rights of women."

"Oh, Lord!" he groaned.

She laughed.

"Women who earn their own living have a perfect right to equality with men. There are men who are just as incapable, just as inefficient as any woman. But there are women—I, Lordly Creature," tapping him on the shin with a dainty foot, "I am quite as capable of earning my living as you—Salt of the Earth!"

He smiled indulgently.

"Yes; in some cases. But even then it never is the same work as a man does."

"*Poof*, and why not?"

"Well, as dressmakers, milliners, needle-workers and—and all that sort of thing, and even then men——"

He paused doubtfully, gazing at her twitching lips.

"Sugar, Lordly Creature?"

"Don't be a fool, Miriam!" he said sourly. "A woman's place is behind the shelter of man. He works, fights, conquers, to her gain."

"Are you fighting and conquering for a woman's gain?"

"Just like a woman!" he retorted. "Mere sentimentality."

"Exactly what is sentimentality?"

"Love—and all that."

"Dear me! Really?"

Their glances met. He laughed with the satisfaction of one parrying a dangerous thrust from the enemy.

"Sentimental bosh of the worst description. Plato——"

"Plato is dead! Live and see for yourself. You'll find out one day!"

"I?" He laughed derisively. "My dear Miriam, one of the great points that I value is that we can be pals, that you never expect me—like every other girl—to make love to you."

Her eyes twinkled. She opened her lips to say something, changed her mind and said—

"Have some more tea, Alan?"

"No, thanks," he said looking at his watch, "I must run up to the office. If there's any fresh development in the Moroccan imbroglio I may have to get away immediately. By the way, Miriam, if I should have to leave in a hurry I sha'n't have time to run home, so you might make a point of seeing the mater and—explaining things. She's always absurdly anxious, imagines things——"

"And doesn't understand men's affairs, eh? But supposing I can't get away?"

"Why not? You've only the usual shop to attend to."

"But I might go abroad, too."

He laughed indulgently.

"My dear child, you're a brilliant journalist—for a woman."

"Thank you!" she said with a short laugh.

"But—oh, women are very well within limits but——"

"What limits, pray?"

"Well, you know what your work is—at races, balls, crushes and all that sort of thing—social work, but——"

"Well, but what? Go on."

"Hang it, Miriam, you can't expect to do a man's work."

"Really! Why not?"

"Well, how on earth could you tackle my job? Fancy a woman as a war correspondent! Why, obviously it's impossible."

"How? Why?"

"Oh, don't be absurd, child! How could a woman travel in Morocco alone, get through the tribes or into some blockaded town, for instance?"

"Well? You haven't explained!"

He jerked out his cigaret-case irritably.

"Well?"

"Oh, I can't be bothered to explain the obvious!"

HER EYES glinted angrily for a moment; then she sat back in the chair to watch him light his cigaret. She observed the broad shoulders and huge limbs, the flaxen hair above his long clean-shaven face. He was not bad-looking really, she decided. The high forehead, straight nose, and prominent jaw suggested a horse's head—a nice horse that she wanted to pat. She smiled at the idea and thought it a pity that his eyes were a trifle small as he stared rather sulkily at his boots. A young giant, but lacking . . . She pulled herself up short and said slowly—

"Alan?"

"Yes?"

"Do you know that you badly need a hiding?"

He smiled complacently, palpably rejoicing in his physique.

"Who's going to give it to me?" he demanded, stretching his arms.

"I'm going to! No, not physically, you (glorious she had nearly said). "You animal, I'm going to give you a good lesson."

He laughed and stood up.

"Come along, my child," he said moving toward the pay desk.

"No, you don't," cried Miriam and slipped in front of him.

"Miriam, don't be——"

"You dare!" she flashed upon him. He turned away with an impatient sigh to wait while she received change.

"I do feel a fool!" he confided to a print on the wall.

"And you are!" said Miriam as she joined him. "Come along!"

They walked up Fleet Street together. She waited whilst he went into his office. He was away longer than Miriam expected and she began to grow impatient. At last he reappeared smiling restrainedly.

"When're you going?" she asked.

"Tomorrow night—overland to Gib. Just seen the chief," he said endeavoring to curb his school-boy excitement.

"And then?"

"On to Fez, to interview the sultan. Latest news is that General Moinier is leaving from Rabat at the request of the sultan to relieve Fez. It's what I told you would happen months ago."

"D'you think Fez will fall?"

"No. The French'll get there all right—unless some one cuts Hafid's throat. Then the Germans will chip in. Then there'll be a lovely row!" he declared enthusiastically.

"The Germans?" said Miriam thoughtfully. "I hadn't thought of that. I must read up the subject."

"Do!" said Alan. "Then you'll be able to follow my stuff better. I'll write you, too."

"Thanks," said Miriam and laughed.

"What're you laughing at?" he demanded.

"Nothing!"

"*H'm.* Come and lunch with me tomorrow? Shall be leaving by the evening boat-train and, I say, don't forget the mater, will you?"

"If I have time."

"Course you'll have time."

"Going on the bust this evening I suppose?" she inquired looking him full in the eyes.

"Promised to dine some of the boys," he said grinning.

"*H'm*—men! Well, good-by, Alan—and good luck. Remember what I told you."

"What you told me?"

"Yes, about a good hiding," she said smiling.

"Oh," said he as one dismissing a trivial question. "My dear girl—but I'll see you tomorrow so——"

"No you won't, I shall be busy."

"Busy! Why?"

"Yes, never mind: you'll know sometime. Good-by—and don't be surprised when we meet again."

"Oh that'll be six months or more—snow and mistletoe at home, eh? Good-by!"

"Good-by, Alan!"

He raised his hat and strode way, his chin a trifle higher, shoulders a little farther back. Miriam watched him for a moment with an enigmatic smile and turning dived into the traffic, making straight to the library of her paper.

She nodded to one of the girls in charge.

"Morocco, please—Revolution, 1908," said Miriam curtly.

The girl went to one of the many lines of pigeonholes containing hundreds of docketed envelopes and selected a large fat one with which Miriam retired to an adjacent desk, sat down and with notebook and pencil proceeded to wade through a vast mass of newspaper cuttings on Morocco.

It was after nine o'clock by the time that Miriam left the library to snatch a hurried dinner and finish some articles for the third and fourth editions.

Contrary to her usual custom she arrived in Fleet Street in the morning and requested a personal interview with her editor after the conference. At last she was ushered into the great man's sanctum. Langley was a notoriously difficult man to handle. She exercised great tact in broaching the proposition.

At first he would not hear of it, although he approved of the idea.

"No, no; it's quite impossible. Quite impossible, Miss Vickers, I'm sorry."

"Why is it impossible? Because I'm a woman?"

"Well, yes; obviously."

"Then you're going to send a man?"

"Yes."

"And steal my idea—Agadir?"

"Really, Miss Vickers, you place me in a very awkward position."

"It isn't awkward at all, Mr. Langley, let me go!"

"But you'd never get in, be murdered, held for ransom, or carried off into the—er—interior. You don't understand what might happen."

"Oh, yes, I do; quite. And take the risk. Come, Mr. Langley, don't be so hidebound by convention. Women can do fine things sometimes. Think, I'm pleading for my sex as well as myself."

"But you ought not to, Miss Vickers. Sex ought not to enter into business."

"Exactly!" cried Miriam triumphantly. "Now you can't refuse!"

Langley smiled grimly.

"Expediency, my dear Miss Vickers. I daren't take the risk of answering to my people if anything happened—to a woman. Think what the public would say."

"Easily got over. I'll use a male *nom de guerre*. That's a sacrifice, Mr. Langley."

He shook his head and frowned slightly.

"I can not do it, Miss Vickers," he announced in a tone of finality. "I'm very pressed for time."

"You must let me go, Mr. Langley. Now everything is a matter of price I'll go for my expenses only."

"No; the odium—the responsibility would be just the same."

"Wait; I'll go in my own name at my own expense. You pay for stuff published—usual foreign rates. You can't afford to refuse that."

"*H'm.*" Langley paused, pursing his hard clean-shaven lips.

"Use a male *nom de guerre* and it's a bargain."

"You're close, Mr. Langley, but women and beggars can't be choosers I suppose. I agree."

CHAPTER II

Be wise, young Jackal, open not by day:
Await the somber safer face of night.
Be sure that all you meet upon the way
Are greyhounds, trained to run you down at sight.
—*Sidi Hammo.*

SOME three weeks later Miriam rose from breakfast on board the R. M. S. *Agadir* to see the streak of white foam of the sandy coast-line run out in a gossamer thread into the horizon where, about a point on the port bow, appeared the dazzling white tops of minarets floating in the refraction of the sun's glare.

Steadily the ship throbbed her way through the empty blue seas, lessening the mirage effect of the distant city until the white houses grew above the black rocks, and the funnels and masts of a French cruiser at anchor materialized against the dark of the land beyond.

Lunch was just ending as they steamed through the deep-water passage and swung to anchor alongside the cruiser. From the deck of the steamer the town, a mass of white-topped houses snuggling within the encircling ramparts, nestled half upon the sandy shore and half upon the greeny-black rocks, where the old arched water-gate stood at the brink of the water in dignified challenge.

To the right of the town was a fair stretch of hard sand sweeping up into the dunes which ran on to the southwest into the foothills of the Atlas Mountains; behind the ship stretched a linked arm of small islets, a natural breakwater against the Atlantic seas. In the blue of the sea and sky the Moorish town scintillated and gleamed like a rare jewel set in the gold of the sand, justifying the native name Es-Sueira, The Picture.

Miriam was more than a little excited at having arrived at the beginning of the great adventure which would prove her theory right or wrong, a theory evolved from a careful study of the map that the objective of the Germans in the first move of the international game of chess for the possession of Morocco would be Agadir, the finest seaport on the Atlantic coast and the key to the great caravan route from the south, closed to trade for fifty years by treaty.

Her plans for the moment were chaotic; and a little fluttered by the fear that Alan or some other male correspondent would have happened upon the same idea. Another British steamer was not expected until the next week; but she had heard that an Italian, French or German boat might turn up any day, all things being erratic and unforeseen in Morocco. Hence her rather flurried determination to make a start at once.

Within an hour Miriam had been baptized in the clinging odor and lazy hum of the Orient once more. At the hotel she had engaged a sharp-faced young guide who spoke a broken English. Feeling that she could conduct inquiries better herself than trust to distortive interpretation she demanded to be taken to the Jewish quarter for although she had no Arabic, she had a sound knowledge of Spanish—archaic Spanish studied as a hobby—which most of the Jews of the Moghreb spoke in the tongue of old Castile, a relic of their forefathers in the peninsula.

She had not as yet formulated any definite plan by which she might gain access to Agadir. The idea of engaging servants and boldly setting out from Mogador was, she saw, quite impracticable; for the one reason that the American consul would never permit her to leave. No; it must be by strategy. The method she intended to investigate was an attempt to approach by water. Failing that, she left the Fates to decide, with the mental reservation that go she would—somehow.

"*Tcha Houdi?*" expostulated Ahmed in disgust.

Miriam insisted, so with a muttered curse calling the wrath of Allah upon Jews and other infidels Ahmed led the way, seeing many perquisites falling into other pockets than his own.

At the end of the narrow street she came upon the ship-party of tourists, suburban dames, sprawling uncomfortably on the backs of donkeys, with indignant noses and perpetual expressions of nervousness at the unstable nature of their straw saddles at which they clawed with frantic fingers; others struggled vainly to appear at home perched upon the red-flanneled cumbrous saddles of their mules; all in too desperate an alarm to do other than appreciate the variety and pungency of the street smells.

Now Miriam had omitted to make the orthodox farewells in sheer dread of the storm of inquisitive questions which would surely accompany the amenities.

"Why, there's Miss Vickers!" cried the foremost dame and immediately fell off her donkey.

During the ensuing hubbub of shrill laughs, cries of distress, and guttural objurgations of the donkey-boys, Miriam made her escape by turning down the first handy turning, which happened to be a narrow dark alley scarce six feet wide, over which the houses met. Hurrying through this tunnel, wondering whether Ahmed would have the sense to follow her, she came out into a small open space thronged with white-robed Moors, amid the dust and filth of horses, camels, mules, and donkeys, grunting and heehawing.

A group of mountaineers, wild elf-locked Berbers with camel-hair turbans, turned to stare at her, their hawk-noses and fierce eyes questioning, covetous. Miriam turned aside to avoid them and met the dark somber eyes of a Moor at her elbow. That look, inscrutable, yet suggestive of unthinkable vices, sent a thrill of apprehension through her. She knew well the insolent expression of certain types of European men, but they seemed artificial in comparison to the calm assurance and depth of wickedness in those Moorish eyes.

SHE turned away to look up the passage. For the first time she felt a misgiving at the prospect of traveling alone in this barbarous country. There was no sign of Ahmed, but out of the gloom of the tunnel appeared a tall gray-bearded figure, clad in a black pill-box cap and black soutane, a veritable patriarch stepping out of a Biblical picture.

As she stood irresolute, not daring to turn for fear of those hideous glances, he came toward her slowly. He glanced at her curiously and at the motley crowd beyond. Evidently her distress was written upon her face; for he paused in front of her as if desiring to speak, but embarrassed for need of the medium of speech. She saw a kindly dignity seasoned with a touch of cunning at the back of those bright black eyes.

"Where does this road lead to?" she inquired in Spanish.

The old Jew showed no surprise, save by the lighting up of his eyes, as, with a gesture of greeting full of exquisite grace, he saluted her and said:

"This is a *fondak* (caravansary). The doña has lost her road?"

"No, señor," replied Miriam. "I sought to take a short-cut. I thank you, I will go back."

"If the doña will permit," said the patriarch, "I will conduct her. She has lost her guide?"

"Yes; Ahmed is a fool; he——"

At that moment a scrawny creature clad in rags, with a brown-seamed face like a gargoyle, brushed roughly past her and spat fiercely between them, rasping out a string of curses.

"The beast!" exclaimed Miriam, glaring after him angrily.

But the Jew apparently had neither heard nor seen the insult, for he was saying imperturbably—

"If the doña will follow me?"

His voice was almost drowned by the voluble curses of his aggressor, the loud laughter of the Moors and the muleteers in the vicinity. Miriam's anger merged into a wave of admiration for the calm dignity of the patriarchal Jew. As she turned to follow him he halted, with his back to the fanatic, who was still spewing curses, sheltering her, and with a courtly gesture bade her go on in front. The action and the grace impressed the girl. No one in this generation, she thought, could have survived the incident with the same inimitable dignity: it was medieval.

And the street thronged with donkeys, mules and horses—the jarring note in the shape of the party of tourists had disappeared—the glimpse of the embattled ramparts with the narrow slits in the bastions fashioned for arrows, made her forget her own incongruous clothes. A French naval officer, smartly uniformed and dapper, making his way through the crowd, seemed like some strange being from another century. As she paused for a moment to allow the Jew to overtake her, she felt a sensation of giddiness as her mind escaped the bonds of suggestion and readjusted itself to reality.

At a little distance along her guide turned off down a cobbled lane to the left and presently halted at a narrow blue door. She was ushered into an open courtyard paved with blue and white tiles; the whitewashed pillars and the mattresses ranged beside the walls in a large room opposite, were scrupulously clean. The yellow sun threw the arched veranda into violet shade, cool and restful.

The old man clapped his hands and in response a young girl with prominent dark eyes, and rosy cheeks appeared. She was dressed in a dark-blue caftan; twisted 'round her black hair was a brilliantly yellow kerchief, and in her small ears large gold earrings. He said something in Hebrew, whereat she laughed merrily and moved away, her slippers shuffling over the tiles, to reappear with another woman similarly clad but elderly and stout.

Miriam was soon seated, uncomfortably enough in European costume, upon the edge of one of the mattresses on the floor. Sweet coffee was brought. The old man sat quietly in one corner, his wife and daughter near to Miriam talking politely in Spanish. Their eyes, shyly inquisitive, questioned every article of her attire.

Gradually Miriam began to lose her sense of strangeness and led the talk upon the ways and customs of the country, to the trend of opinion concerning the present sultan and the general situation, gaining copy as a good journalist should. When at length Miriam intimated that she would like to leave they insisted that she must break bread with them. Miriam felt a queer sense of shame in pretending to protest that she must go whilst she really wished and intended to stay.

The breaking of bread was a ceremonious affair of many dishes; chiefly *cous-cous*, an Arab dish of semolina but made in the Jewish style with raisins. Although she soon felt very much at home there was an ever-recurring sense of incongruity. The manipulation of her Parisian-shod feet troubled her; her sun-hat became an abomination and her comparatively loose skirt developed the tentacles of an octopus in cramping her limbs. She longed to throw them away, and envied the cool caftan and bare feet of the little goggle-eyed Jewess. Boots indeed seemed a sacrilege on the smooth tiled floor.

At last she was driven to discard her hat and, scarcely realizing what she was doing, so fumbled with her hairpins that her long black tresses rolled down her back to the admiration of her hostess and daughter.

There seemed an atavistic sense of her natural environment in the air. She was impelled to confide in the patriarch sitting there so wise and dignified. She felt sure that they would not betray her. For a moment she conquered the desire and, to compromise, began to talk of Agadir.

The old man, Musa Ben Ibrahim, described the place to her. She was conscious of exaltation when he announced that he had relatives and many business friends there. He held forth long and earnestly against the tyranny and injustice of the Kaid Gilhooli, chief of the district. Miriam inquired whether it were possible to approach the town by water, saying that she had a friend who thought of going that way. Ben Ibrahim wagged a forefinger in dissent. It would be quite impossible to get a boat of any sort to undertake the trip from Mogador. He advised her friend not to attempt it. The land journey was the usual way, but dangerous even for Moorish or Jewish merchants. Miriam's heart sank.

AT THAT moment little Zara, who had taken a great fancy to Miriam and had seated herself as close as she dared to her, could restrain her curiosity no longer. Her black eyes goggling with excitement she craved permission to see and handle a string of blue Egyptian beads which Miriam wore. Miriam unfastened and handed them to Zara who yelped with delighted admiration, flinging a score of questions. Then Miriam, her disappointment dulled for the moment by the distraction, asked to be allowed to see the girl's hair kerchief.

Zara laughed delightedly at the compliment as she quickly unwound it. Miriam, after admiring the texture, laughingly put it over her own head. Zara, quick to grasp an idea, wriggled over and bound it in the Jewish fashion over Miriam's long hair, and sat back with many "Eh! ehs!" of admiration, pointing a triumphant podgy finger. Miriam glanced at her host. He was staring at her in amazement.

"By Abraham!" he cried. "Look, my woman, she is one of us!"

Miriam flushed and laughed. Zara, with a little cry sprang up and pattered away, she returned, staggering under the weight of a gilded mirror which her father assisted her to rest on the floor. Miriam gave an involuntary cry of astonishment. The bright-yellow kerchief bound about her own raven hair, her own large Latin eyes, olive-tinted complexion and red lips formed the picture of a typical Oriental Jewess, peering amazedly. With heavy gold earrings and the caftan the resemblance would have been perfect.

For a moment or two Miriam was annoyed. Then she gave a gasp and sat back abruptly, staring at the patriarch in the corner. The solution of the problem of entering Agadir had flashed into her mind. In the Jewish garb nobody, not even a Moor, would suspect her American nationality. She felt an almost overwhelming desire to hug the old man, to tear off her boots and European clothes, to dance, sing, laugh, and cry at the same time.

With an effort she controlled herself, smiled and gave back the kerchief to Zara. As a preliminary, she told little Zara to keep the Egyptian necklace, to the little one's wild delight, who, not to be outdone in courtesy, insisted that Miriam should accept the hair kerchief.

Miriam now keen upon business, thanked her absent-mindedly. She reflected that this man had relatives at Agadir and business dealings. He would surely be sending, or having a share, sooner or later, in some caravan going to Agadir. She must persuade him to let her go disguised as a Jewess.

Talking and smiling abstractedly she thought out her plan of action. She had contemplated going as a Moorish woman, but as such great difficulties would have to be overcome; for her liberty would be necessarily restricted, and she had no liking to trust herself in the hands of any Moor.

A panic seized her that Alan or some other correspondent might arrive at any moment. She must lose no time but strike whilst the opportunity served. After a short preamble to the effect that she was a woman writer in which she had some difficulty in convincing them—they seemed to think it a great joke and laughed discreditingly—she plunged straight into her proposition.

At first it was received with uplifted palms of horror. It was impossible—if anything happened the American consul would hold him responsible. But when Miriam pointed out that she was prepared to pay well the refusals became less emphatic; and she hinted that there were sure to be other Jews who would not be so timid. After an excited colloquy with his wife amid much gesticulation he agreed. Then came the crux of the argument—the price. For all his patriarchal benevolence and hospitality, the mention of *douro*—long and gesticulatory was the bargaining, but at length it was completed.

There was no caravan leaving for two weeks, he protested; but in consideration of certain money one should leave on the morrow with Miriam in charge of his son and little Zara as her maid.

The sky was a pageant of scarlet and

amber, fading to violet over the dense blue of the sea as Miriam returned to the hotel. Here she discovered the proprietor in a state of incoherent excitement imploring the consul to organize a search-party as Ahmed had returned with the news that Miss Vickers had been kidnaped. Miriam almost laughed herself into hysterics; more at the thought of her success than at the corpulent distress of Boniface.

CHAPTER III

Bismillah! Here's ink, a fair tablet, a pen,
I'll set down the names of your enemies, men.
The wandering bees, which betray the rich store;
These, these are your foes, and will be evermore!
—*Sidi Hammo.*

FIVE days later a small caravan wound through a rugged and rocky defile. The glare of the afternoon sun shone straight into the eyes of the travelers. In the van riding sideways upon a decrepit pack-horse, was Yakub Bin Musa, a young Jew, who, with his black cropped hair and small mustache was of a type which, save for the black fez cap and dirty gray soutane might be seen any day in London or New York, immaculately clad in conventional garb.

Behind straggled a small train of pack-donkeys in the midst of which were a party of three men—a boy of fifteen and two ancients—and two women. All were mounted on donkeys astride or sideways upon the straw-filled packsaddles as big as half a sofa. For miles they had plodded along the rugged mountain-side in silence save for objurgatory oaths on the part of the men toward the animals who traveled patiently with the blasé air of their kind, the big ears swaying listlessly.

To the south the land fell away in rough undulations like enormous tumuli, to a vast plain across which meandered a faint broad track, as of an army—the great highway across the Sus from Timbuktu and the Soudan. Scattered at long intervals were a few mud-walled villages, glinting white in the sunlight, and on the horizon the blue of distant hills. Behind the ground rose in jumbles masses of sandy rock and sward losing itself in the brown and blue of the heights of the lower Atlas Mountains, bold and stately.

Presently in a twist of a hill path a group of horsemen appeared: three wore the dignified white robes and hoods of the Moor and were mounted on scarlet saddles; the others in the van were wild-looking Arabs in gray woolen garments, black elflocks peeping out below their camel-hair turbans, long-barreled guns sticking out across their pommels. As they approached, riding in the insolent manner of the conquering race, the Jewish party drove their animals off the track to allow them to pass.

The Jews cringed as the white-clad leaders rode in haughty silence, apparently unaware of their presence. The ragged mob of the escort favored them with disdainful glances. a few muttered "*Ya Houdi* (Jew)!" accompanying the reproach with a contemptuous spit.

But as the three came abreast of the two women, one, a falcon-faced man, deliberately rode over to the elder of the two girls, pulled up his horse so that it barred her donkey's progress and bending over in his saddle peered insolently into her face. As he made a loud remark in Arabic with gleaming teeth and eyes afire, the little girl, a few paces behind, screamed in alarm. The men of their party stared helplessly.

The large sloe eyes of the girl were wide with alarm as she tried to drive her donkey 'round, exclaiming:

"*Zid! zid* (go on)."

The other horsemen who had slowed up to see the fun, laughed and shouted ribald remarks. The Moor bent further over in his saddle, grinning wickedly. Miriam's eyes flashed angrily; she swayed backward in the saddle, clutching with one hand to keep her seat as she swung the other with all her force in a resounding slap across her persecutor's face.

The man shot upright in his saddle like a released spring, speechless with indignant amazement. Never in all his roving life had he had such an experience from a woman—and by Allah, a daughter of a filthy Jew!

Miriam, mad angry, kicked her donkey into motion and smacking his head on one side—for she had no reins—piloted him 'round an equestrian statue of a Moor. The Jews were dumb with fright, fearing instant retribution. The man's companions continued to ride on slowly, turning in their saddles to watch the comedy. The Moor stared blankly at Miriam as she passed him; hesitated; then breaking into a volley of curses against the Jews, rammed home the sharp edge of his stirrups and rode off with a clatter.

When Miriam had time to look at her companions she saw that they were yellow-gray, their teeth chattering like castanets. Her anger died as the danger passed.

"Beard of my father!" stuttered Yakub, "know ye not who they were? That was the Khalifa, Esha ben Fila!"

Miriam recollected that this man was the Moorish governor of the district. She looked back and laughed, feeling rather perky over her triumph; but her escort after exchanging glances, continued the march in silence. Indeed Miriam never quite realized, as the Jews did, that she had been within an ace of having the whole party massacred.

For another two hours the caravan plodded along monotonously, gradually descending and nearing the great broad track of the Sus highway. Little Zara, riding close to Miriam, could scarcely take her eyes off the heroine of such a great adventure, breaking out into little giggles of admiration. It began to dawn upon Miriam as, constantly changing her position on her uncomfortable pack to gain five minutes' relief to her aching back and cramped limbs, that she had let herself into a very precarious situation.

For some twenty awful minutes of depression, probably caused by the reaction from the excitement and the trying conditions of the journey, she regretted that she had ever undertaken the trip. She nursed, too, a sullen resentment against the men of her escort, despising them for their craven attitude, wholly forgetting that they were unarmed and, moreover, were of a race down-trodden and abused for centuries by her aggressor's people. She imagined with a thrill of the pride of race of what would probably have happened had Alan been with her.

Then the sequential train of thought that she was on the verge of success and scoring a point over Alan and other men, brought back her self-confidence and put her in an optimistic mood once more. Still heartily did she wish that the aching monotonous journey would come to an end as she—let it not be whispered in Gath—scratched herself—for in every village and tent in Morocco there are many varieties of insects—yearning mightily for a hot bath and carbolic soap.

AT LENGTH as the sun reached its zenith the mountain trail converged into the main caravan road scored by the tracks of countless camels, horses and mules. Within the next half-hour upon rounding a shoulder of the hillside the blue of water leaped into view, awaking Miriam from a tired and dusty lethargy into drumming her donkey's ribs impatiently with her bare heels. By degrees appeared the mud huts of Fonti scattered low on the beach; the rampart walls along the foreshore beyond; then perched high upon a conical mass of black rock, washed in creamy foam, a gray Moorish fort.

The town nestling between the walls, lay on the slope of a hillside some six hundred feet above the water, white and dazzling in the sunshine. Outside the walls a gray open space was crowded with a seething mass of men and animals, the *sok*—market-place—upon the farther side, outlining the tops of fairy minarets and the rugged turrets of the khalifa's castle, was the warm dark-green of an olive plantation.

Urging her donkey faster Miriam came up with Yakub who had pulled up at a turn of the trail commanding a view of the harbor. There was a look of relief on his face as if rejoicing at the prospect of losing the responsibility of his charge, as he exclaimed, pointing a dirty finger:

"Look, signorina! Agadir!"

Miriam's heart gave an exultant leap. Her eyes ran feverishly over the sweep of the rocky land behind the bastion into the curving blue of the headland ending in Cape Ghir eighteen miles away like a gigantic protecting arm forming an almost land-locked harbor. On the opposite low shore some miles away was the commencement of the Sus plain through which, near at hand, ran the Wadu Tamaraka and the Wadu Sus, low and out of sight.

As Miriam, an hour later, passed beneath the shadow of the Babes-Sus, the main gate of Agadir, with its huge metal-sheathed, nail-studded doors, into the narrow cobbled streets thronged with white-robed Moors, elf-locked Berbers, impassive woolen-garbed Susi, many negro slaves and a few hooded women, she felt that wonderful thrill of exultation on the accomplishment of a coveted ambition.

The excitement was fully sustained until in a mean little house, blue-washed as usual, but not like Ben Ibrahim's small palace at Mogador, Miriam had leisure to take stock of her temporary home. Her host was a mildewed little man, a snuffling wheezy Shylock, rapacious-eyed and predatory of nose; the hostess, a pallid bundle of dirty clothes. As a consolation there were two little girls with gollywog eyes and precocious minds who seemed gifted with a disinterested affection for Miriam, but which little Zara, out of jealousy perhaps, instantly pronounced to be cupboard love.

But that night as Miriam, after a lick and a promise with the aid of a cracked jar of water, saw to the safety of her baggage, consisting of two fountain pens, a supply of ink and paper and a revolver, she was in an irritable state of mind as well as body—particularly of body! All the romance of the great adventure seemed to have died—bitten to death as Miriam expressed it savagely. And when she had retired to her allotted mattress, she imagined how Alan would laugh at her.

Then the visual picture of herself indignantly denying it, crying "I—" scratch, scratch—"can stand it as well—" scratch, scratch—"as any man—" scratch, scratch, tickled her sense of humor. The spell of misery was broken. As she wriggled her head on the hard pillow made of a bundle of robes, and stretched her stiff and aching limbs, she chuckled.

The next day Miriam spent in writing. She went for a ramble in the evening under the escort of Yakub to the ramparts overlooking the bay, keenly observing the environment and catechizing him. Fortunately Yakub was a native of the place, so that she was able to glean brief biographies and estimate the relative importance of the notables, including a garbled history of the place—half of which, unfortunately long after the copy had been sent away, she sadly discovered to have originated in the fertile brain of Yakub, too eager to please.

He pointed out to her the palace of the khalifa—a bad man and cruel according to Yakub—in the western end of the town just beyond the principal mosque. Immediately she desired to visit it. Yakub was horrified; he flatly refused to make any attempt to take her through the town at all until a bald promise of much *backsheesh* set his wits to work. Eventually he arrived at the conclusion that the visit might be accomplished in company with two old Jewesses who were permitted to visit the harem ladies to sell various trinkets and trading stuffs, but stipulating that it would require still more *hassani* to bribe the women.

As Miriam made a faint effort at haggling Yakub's eyes glinted greedily as he tried to think of some other tangible excuse for extracting more money. So it was settled that the venture was to be made upon the morrow.

Miriam sat herself upon an ancient cannon mounted upon a clumsy wooden carriage, the wheels of which were made of thick planks of wood bound together with heavy cross-laths, the impotent muzzle pointing through the embrasure commanding the bay. Away to the west of her was the little fishing-village of Fonti which they had passed on their trail, a few European-built towing-boats lying upon the small stretch of sand. About half a mile out a similar boat was approaching the town, the distant oar-blades sparkling in the sun. As she leaned idly admiring the deserted blue waters of the bay there floated out the call to prayer from the distant mosque:

"Al-lah Ak-ba-ah! Allah il Allah! La illaha il Allah, wa Mohammed er-rasool Al-la-a-ah!"

* * *

THE call rising in three notes to a high-pitched chant, rang out eerie and plaintive, dying away in sweet cadence to a faint echo in the hill beyond to be caught up quite near her by another *mueddin.*

The first time that Miriam had heard the call to prayer she had been deeply impressed with the beauty and the calm mystery, in such antithesis to the fierce lustful creed which it represented. And here in Agadir isolated from any of her kind the effect was intensified. She glanced across at Yakub who was squatting in the shade of the rampart staring craftily at nothing, an avaricious smile playing over his mouth—probably thinking of the dollars he was going to make.

She felt that time had buckled back into the fifteenth century; that she was in another period, for the medieval environment was perfect. She found herself imagining that Yakub might well be the biblical Jacob as a young man. Noah she was sure was the replica of the dignified Ben Ibrahim at Mogador.

An approaching footstep startled her. She looked up to see a man of medium height in European clothes advancing. She stared for a moment, unable to believe her eyes; then panic seized her that she had failed after all; that this man was some correspondent who had stolen a march on her. He wore a shabby suit of gray, a light red tie, a dirty collar and a small artisan's cap. His lean face was shaped like a hatchet; two pale eyes peered sharply over a predatory nose.

Miriam glanced at Yakub interrogatively. He appeared startled and put one finger to his lips suggestively. Miriam was puzzled. Why should Yakub fear this man? He was now quite close. He glanced at Yakub and at her. Miriam felt the contempt in the look and flushed with annoyance, forgetting the guise in which he saw her. Then when nearly abreast of her he turned his head abruptly as if vexed at her scrutiny. He was about to replace a cigaret in his mouth, but the hand remained in mid-air as he paused and deliberately stared.

Miriam wondered what paper he represented and tried to decide whether he was English or not. She thought not. He passed on, looked 'round twice and, as if having made up his mind, turned back and came straight toward her. Miriam heard a muttered exclamation from Yakub. Suddenly recollecting that she was a Jewess she looked the other way and cast down her eyes, wondering what he was going to do. She felt an impulse to speak to him in French. It would be such a luxury to talk to a fellow-European—even if he were a rival correspondent—and if a foreigner it did not matter very much. She felt him look her up and down deliberately, insolently, and involuntarily she blushed.

"*Ashkoonik?*" he demanded abruptly.

She heard Yakub reply for her. She looked 'round at the stranger as he asked another question in Arabic which she could not understand. She decided that she did not like the snarling curve of his lips underneath the yellow mustache as he smiled at her.

"*Je ne parle pas Arabic,*" she said curtly.

"So? *Vous parlez français, eh, chérie?*" he said.

Insolently smiling he advanced a step toward her and lifted a hand as if to chuck her under the chin.

"You dare!" exclaimed Miriam angrily, sliding off her gun.

The next instant she could have bitten her tongue off.

"*Lieber Gott!*"

He peered keenly at her.

"You are English!" he said, and sweeping off his cap apologized profusely.

He explained that he had meant no offense, but thinking her to be a Jewess, he could not understand her imperious tone. For quite three minutes he stood and explained in fluent English, whilst Miriam, weakening to his flattery, lost her sudden antipathy.

"My name is de Bouche," he continued, "Baron de Bouche. Whom have I——"

He raised his eyebrows interrogatively.

For a moment Miriam hesitated.

"Miriam Vickers is my name. I am American," she said. "Are you a—for a newspaper?"

"*Nein*—no. I have business here—that is all," he replied.

He appeared slightly disturbed at the mention of the press and eyed her sharply.

"What paper are you here for then, Miss Vickers?"

"Oh, none at all!"

She scarcely knew why she had made the denial.

"I am traveling—well," she laughed deliciously, suddenly developing a keen relish in diplomacy, "well, to tell you the truth I came here disguised like this from Mogador for fun more than anything else. I had a friend with me, but she wouldn't come. But it's been a delightful experience—rather rash I thought at first."

She was pleased at her own faculty for embroidery. She had looked him straight in the eyes as she had made the statement, but he seemed too engrossed in admiring her face to be hypercritical.

"So? Yes," he replied; "it was rash. You are returning now?"

"Oh, I don't know—perhaps. When I get tired of the novelty."

"So? If you will pardon me offering advice it would be well for you to return soon. This is no place for—forgive me—a handsome woman."

"So I have discovered," retorted Miriam smiling.

"So? But you do not realize the danger."

He spoke emphatically but with the manner of a man carrying on a rational conversation and thinking about something else at the same time; his eyes never ceased devouring her face and figure. She became uncomfortable and the antipathy returned.

"Oh, I'm aware of the danger," she said.

"So?"

SHE TALKED on for some time in a similar strain urging her to leave. Yakub sat silent, watching the two. At length Miriam said that she was going home and called to Yakub. The baron bade her "good night," explaining that he dared not escort her through the town for fear of drawing the attention of the Moors to her.

"Who is that man, Yakub?" she inquired as soon as they were out of earshot and in a quiet lane.

"Es-sid-el Keleeb," returned Yakub, who was obviously greatly perturbed.

"Why has he that name?"

"Because he has been about Morocco for many years and used to have with him always a little dog; on horseback or mule the dog was always with him; that is why the Moors call him the master-of-the-little-dog. He is a bad man. The Moors and Jews alike hate him. One day——"

Yakub leered and drew a finger across his throat.

At that moment, although Yakub chose the most deserted way, they came upon a small *sok* of shops. Half-way through the crowded space, there was a cry of "*Balaak! Balak!*"—make way—as, preceded by two ragged soldiers, a swarthy-bearded Moor appeared, clad in white, riding on a richly caparisoned horse.

"*El khalifa!*" whispered Yakub, and drew Miriam aside into the throng to permit the great man to pass.

The coal-black slave, walking at the horse's head, mocking the sultan's pomp and ceremony, struck Miriam across the shins with a staff. Miriam stifled a cry as Yakub roughly dragged her farther into the press. She looked 'round angrily as the yellow shoe and bare heel encased in the shovel stirrup of the governor brushed her hip, to meet a pair of tired eyes squinting down a falcon nose.

Then to her horror she recognized him as he pulled up his horse and bent over toward her She heard a smothered whine from Yakub and a host of unintelligible remarks from the uncouth crowd about her. The khalifa was saying something to her.

"She is my cousin, *ya sidi*," whined Yakub.

"What is thy name, Jew?"

Miriam fascinated with fright mechanically noted the lean brown hands holding the crimson reins, the thick sensual lips and the pouched eyes.

"Yakub Bin Musa," snuffled Yakub.

The crowd was eagerly peering about, straining to catch a glimpse of the khalifa's new fancy. Several muttered curses and contemptuous cries of "*Houdi! Keleeb Houdi*"—dogs and Jews. She felt the fierce scrutiny once more; then he nodded and with a word to his slaves rode on.

After the clattering escort had passed Yakub hurried her along amid laughs and curses from the released mob, humming like a swarm of bees. As soon as they were in a quiet street once more, Yakub hastened her along, wailing that all was lost; that the khalifa was a bad man and bemoaning their fate generally.

After this excitement had died down Miriam bribed Yakub to keep silent on the matter; for she foresaw that the Jewish family would take fright and insist upon her departure if they knew. Yakub eventually consented, avarice overcoming fear.

That night she returned to her interrupted topic of the baron, upon which Yakub, safe in the recesses of his house, proceeded to enlarge. The baron, vide Yakub, spoke almost every European language with equal fluency; he had been in Morocco for some eight years engaged in running arms and ammunition—a great deal of it through Agadir, so Yakub said—and in trading or stealing cattle. He was treacherous, and many parts of the country were barred to him lest he meet the just wrath of some swindled Moor. This was interesting enough, Miriam thought, but it was not until Yakub mentioned as if of no importance, that the baron was in league with Germany that Miriam's journalistic instincts were fully aroused.

"With Germany? How?" demanded Miriam.

"Señor Baron," said Yakub, "has for a long time spent much money, money from Germany. That is why the Moors here do not kill him. He is under protection of the khalifa."

Yakub rubbed his forefinger and thumb together, the eloquent gesture signifying dollars.

"But what does he do here?" inquired Miriam eagerly.

"He promises that Germany shall help the Moors against the dogs of French—but he lies," observed Yakub emphatically.

"Why?"

"He lies," he asserted gesturing. "He pays many dollars to make them listen to him. As long as the river of dollars lasts so long will they listen to him, but when it is dry——"

He leered suggestively.

"But how do you know that he is acting for Germany?"

"They say these things in the *sok*—and my aunt and cousin hear them from the harem ladies of the khalifa. Señor Baron lives in a house of the khalifa. Yes, it is so," said Yakub, and added nonchalantly as he rose to his feet, "Señor Baron has promised that a German war-ship will come to Agadir to prove his words—*pah!*"

"What?" exclaimed Miriam agog. "War-ship in Agadir! I was right!" she added excitedly in English. "Sit down Yakub! Are you sure? When?"

"Allah only knows—*Munana* (tomorrow). Come, signorina, Zara is calling to supper!"

But Miriam's pen was racing at top speed.

TWO days had elapsed before Miriam was enabled to make the promised visit to the harem of the khalifa. In the large tiled courtyard opening on to the gardens she squatted in company with the two old Jewesses whilst they displayed their goods and haggled with the ladies of the harem, a motley group of women; a few old and haggard, others mere children of fourteen with dark sloe eyes and velvet skins, their fat arms—for avoirdupois is beauty in Moorish eyes—smothered in silver bangles, their hair and ears similarly bedecked.

Among the attendant slaves, huge gross eunuchs and negresses, Miriam noticed a sweetly pretty half-caste, lean, and therefore despised. She was as active as a leopardess and had a petulant discontented expression. Miriam made friends with the aid of a silver bangle upon observing that she could speak Spanish. Her name was Ramah and her face lit up with mischievous pleasure on learning what Miriam desired her to do. Gossip is half the soul of a Moorish woman.

Two, three, four more days passed and still no sign of the promised diplomatic coup. Miriam began to think uneasily of those close-written sheets she had dispatched by special runner to her agent in Mogador. Except for an early morning walk upon the ramparts approached by a circuitous route in the vain hope of seeing the war-ship, Miriam, after the episode in the *sok*, was kept almost a close prisoner in the Jewish house. On the third day, to Miriam's annoyance, the baron walked into the house. He apologized for calling, excusing himself on the grounds that he had heard that she had not taken his advice, and was anxious for her safety.

He dismissed the Jews from the room in an autocratic manner. Miriam objected, but he feigned not to have heard her. He was a born raconteur; he entertained her with vivid stories of sport, duelling, intrigue and adventure in every capital in Europe to the wilds of Borneo and China. He seemed to have been everywhere and done everything—and everybody, beating down Miriam's antipathy until at times she thought him the most fascinating man she had ever met. Again he urged her to leave, gazing at her the whole time with undisguised admiration. But Miriam felt afraid of the man and was relieved when he departed.

One moonlight evening she arrived upon the ramparts to see the somber shape of a gunboat lying at anchor some two miles out, stealthy and ominous under the flocculent sky. She stared, drinking in the sight and thinking with a triumphant smile of Alan. She was aroused from her pleasing reverie by an exclamation from Yakub and looked up to see the baron approaching her.

"Ah, good evening, Miss Vickers."

"Look! Look!" cried Miriam, forgetting her dislike of the man and pointing across the bay. "There's the war-ship."

"The war-ship?" he repeated quickly.

"I mean," said Miriam recollecting, "a war-ship. What is it, a cruiser? Do tell me and why is she here?"

"No, it's a gunboat," returned the baron, coming close to her. "But I want to talk of something else to you."

There was a thick note in his voice that made Miriam glance 'round at him.

"Briefly this," he turned suddenly to Yakub and said harshly: "*Emshiil* (go away.)"

Yakub went a few paces, watching the baron with frightened eyes.

"How dare you order my servant about?" demanded Miriam.

"So? I dare anything and anybody when I wish," said the baron quietly, looking at Miriam hungrily. "I have warned you to leave here. You will not. *Herr Gott*—now I tell you I love you. So? Don't start from me!" he added with a snarl intended for a smile as Miriam shrank from him. "You are in great danger. Leave with me under my protection. You can not go by road. I have a ship coming in a few days. You will come with me?"

"I sha'n't do anything of the sort," exclaimed Miriam angrily, although her heart beat faster.

"So? When I want a thing I take it," said the baron, watching her with a piercing stare. "You will come with me?"

"No, I will not! You dare——"

"So? Then choose—the khalifa has seen you and seeks you. You are the sort who inflame men's minds! Think—imagine what will happen to you—in the harem, so? Sid Eisha has a taste for sweet womanhood—now, little fool, choose!"

Miriam grew pale as she realized her peril. Her thoughts raced—if only Alan . . .

"*Gott verdampf nochmal, der Teufel soll's holen*—choose, you devil-faced beauty."

A floccus of cloud obscured the moon.

"I shall appeal for protection to that war-ship out there," she exclaimed, pointing her finger across the bay.

The baron laughed.

"So? I think not, little fool."

He took a step forward, his eyes aflame. Miriam in a panic whipped out her revolver. But with a catlike spring the baron seized her wrist and twisted the gun out of her hand.

"Yakub, Yakub!" she panted, but Yakub had vanished.

The baron flung her from him, lifted the revolver over the parapet with the toe of his boot and laughed in her face.

"You she-devil," he said, "I love you all the more. Go home now and think it over. Adios!"

And with a ceremonious bow he turned and walked off. For a moment Miriam stared after him, white and panting with rage; then as he disappeared 'round the angle of the wall she buried her face in her hands, facing the placid gunboat out in the bay, and sobbed.

CHAPTER IV

Like artless fawn, each fair gazelle reposes
Upon her forest couch of musk and roses;
The air instinct with dreams of perfumed pleasure—
A sight, I swear, worth camel-loads of treasure.
—*Sidi Hammo.*

ALAN CARFAX arrived at Rabat from Fez very pleased with himself. He had intended to lie *perdu* for a while watching events, but to his disgust he received a peremptory cable informing him of a big news scoop by an opposition paper, from their special correspondant at Agadir, prophesying the advent of a German war-ship. Alan smiled skeptically; but he began to wonder who his rival might be.

He hurried on to Mogador where he failed to discover a trace of any man having passed through. Finally he concluded that one Foote, a wily individual of the *Daily Post*, had stolen a march by water. There was not even a rumor in Mogador of any occupation of Agadir: every one scoffed at such an idea. Alan wrote a scathing article upon the credulity of newspaper correspondents in general and began preparations to set out for Agadir, filled with an unholy joy at the thought of the lemon he had handed to the other man—whoever he might be.

But when a week later he rode, preceded by a weedy red-capped soldier of the Makhzen, past Fonti and up the slope toward Agadir, he stared gloomily and swore as he caught sight of the *Panther* lying on the sunlit waters, grim and businesslike. But now. . . .

As he followed the soldier through the camel-skin tents and groups of tribesmen encamped in the outer *sok* he scarcely noticed the scowls and muttered curses against the infidel. His brain incessantly clamored for a solution of the problem. He saw that wretched scathing article appearing and the ensuing wrath of his editor. He expected every moment to see the fat sardonic smile of Charlie Foote grinning triumphantly at him in the white-walled streets.

Abd-el-Kader, the soldier, had pulled up and roused him from his reflections with the remark that they must rest here.

"*Fain?*" demanded Alan.

"Here," returned the soldier. "Now I go to see the khalifa that he may give us—if Allah wills—a place to sleep."

Alan frowned at the delay; but by experience knew that it was inevitable. So Abd-el-Kader clattered away leaving Alan to squat in the shade of a wall in company with his muleteers and servants to pass the time in smoke and contemplation of Allah the All-Merciful. The muezzin was still chanting while they waited.

As Alan stared idly at the hovering flies, the clatter of hoofs made him look 'round to see another European mounted on a coal-black, long-maned stallion. At first Alan thought it was the redoubtable Foote, but a second glance revealed a hatchet-faced stranger. The man pulled up in front of him, his animal curveting and snorting trying to savage the meek steeds of Alan's party.

"Good afternoon," said the man after a piercing stare. "You're a correspondent, I suppose?"

"Yes, I am," retorted Alan taking umbrage at the domineering tone. "Who the devil are you?"

The man watched him with a quiet glare, curbing and sitting his resless mount like one of the Bersaglieri.

"Are you from the *Daily Post?*" demanded Alan.

The other smiled contemptuously.

"No, I have not that honor. By the way I would advise you to return to Mogador."

"Why?"

"Because you will find that this is not a healthy spot for a meddlesome journalist. Take my advice. *Buenas noches;*" and loosing rein he galloped up the deep-rutted street.

Alan stood gazing after him. He turned to his men.

"Who is he?"

"A son of Shaitan!" said a Moor tonelessly. "Es-sid-el-Keleeb."

A few minutes afterward Abd-el-Kader returned, pulled up his rickety animal and with an imperious wave of the hand beckoned them forward.

"*Ajee!*" (Come!)

"*Ajee,*" echoed Alan angrily. "Who the devil are you talking to, you brown-faced baboon."

"*Ajee!*" repeated Abd-el-Kader with a face of bronze, and turning rode slowly up the street.

Alan would have dearly loved to have knocked him down, but he knew that he dared not. On the trip Abd-el-Kader had been most affable, but now . . . What was the reason?

Following the line of the walls Abd-el-Kader halted at last in a bare open space on the ramparts and intimated that they were to camp there. Alan objected, but was curtly told that such was the khalifa's order. He raged inwardly and demanded to be taken to the khalifa in person. At first Abd-el-Kader refused, saying that he was too tired. Alan mounted and rode off by himself, followed presently by Abd-el-Kader muttering pious curses on all infidels.

They arrived at the outer courtyard of the palace where Abd-el-Kader conversed apart with one of the khalifa's soldiers who glanced in Alan's direction, nodded, and departed. Abd-el-Kader squatted on the cobbles in the corner, produced a *kiff* pipe and placidly proceeded to smoke.

"Has he gone to tell the khalifa?" demanded Alan.

"If Allah wills!" returned Abd-el-Kader, exhaling smoke, in a voice devoid of expression.

"When shall we see him?"

"When Allah wills!"

"I must see him now—quickly—understand?"

"Allah is all merciful!"

Alan bit his lip and swore softly.

Half an hour passed slowly. The horses fidgeted, flicking at the flies with their long tails; Abd-el-Kader smoked with the eternal placidity of a Buddha. There was no other sign of life. The elongated shadows grew denser.

"Is he going to see me or not?" demanded Alan.

"If Allah wills," came the placid reply.

Alan swore violently; and curbed himself. He had been through similar ordeals so often.

"Who is that other *Roumi* (European) here?" he inquired presently.

"Allah only knows!"

"Abd-el-Kader!"

Abd-el-Kader looked up sleepily from his pipe with cold expressionless eyes.

"What ails thee?"

"Allah only knows!"

Alan gave it up. He felt a wild desire to attack some one violently—Abd-el-Kader for choice—and getting up, fell to pacing slowly the courtyard. Once a red-capped soldier appeared, stared at them with incurious eyes, and vanished.

THEN as he turned on his quarter-deck march he became aware of some one watching him. He glanced up and caught a glimpse of a pair of large bright eyes set in a frame of blue-black hair. He glanced at Abd-el-Kader, him absorbing dreams of paradise through the narrow pipe-stem. As Alan came back he watched. The eyes came above the level of the wall, twinkled and were followed by the face, a creamy olive-tinted face, with pomegranate lips and pearly teeth disclosed in a shy smile.

Alan forgot his annoyance and halted just below the wall. The huge silver earrings wobbled violently; the face disappeared and shot up again, peering curiously down at him. Alan seemed to have forgotten his pose as a misogynist. He glanced 'round cautiously.

"Who art thou?" he asked.

"Ra-mah!" came the reply deliciously sweet. Small hands with henna-stained nails came over the wall; the whole of her bust appeared and the girl gazed at him ardently.

"Thou are beautiful to look upon, oh, *Roumi*," she announced with the naive innocence of a wild creature.

"Oh!" said Alan inanely and blushed. When he raised his eyes again—feeling an awful fool, as he expressed it—she was still watching him with longing eyes.

"What dost thou, oh, *Roumi?*" she inquired curiously.

"I am seeking audience with the khalifa," answered Alan, glad to escape from an embarrassing topic.

She smiled—gloriously, Alan thought involuntarily.

"Thou wilt not speak with him this day," she said, "for he is now with his women in the garden."

"*Barakolofik!* (Thank you!)" exclaimed Alan as he flushed with rage at the thought of the deliberate way in which he had been fooled.

"*Mahababbikum!* (A thousand times welcome)," she smiled at him. "Where dost thou live?"

"My tent will be pitched by the further ramparts," he replied somewhat sulkily. "Who art thou, oh, Ramah?"

"I am but the slave of the khalifa," she said; "but I find no favor in his sight."

There was a long pause.

"You're —— pretty!" exclaimed Alan suddenly in English.

Her eyes welled with delight, the whole of her face seemed transfigured as she read the flare of admiration in his eyes.

"*Hamdullah!* (Allah be praised!)" she exclaimed, "that I please my lord!"

And immediately Alan became self-conscious.

"I must go," he said sharply. "Good night, oh, Ramah!"

"Allah watch over thee," she responded softly.

He awakened Abd-el-Kader, far gone in the realms of *kiff*, with difficulty. As they neared the site of his camp he came upon a Jew and Jewess walking. Still thinking of Ramah he glanced idly at the girl, started and looked again. She was watching him and as he passed her she peered up into his face and laughed.

"Good God!" exclaimed Alan turning in his saddle, "what an extraordinary resemblance! If—" She turned and laughed again. "Why that's Miriam's double!"

Alan had much to think of that evening; of his position, of Ramah, and not a little of Miriam amid the roar of Fleet Street. He fell asleep—to dream of Ramah—who mysteriously changed like a dissolving view into Miriam.

Next morning as the rising sun tipped the minarets and white-topped roofs in a rosy flood, Alan rode up to the khalifa's palace once more, in company with one Bu Shaib, a red-bearded son of the Riff. This time the outer courtyard held a dozen horses and mules; some of their owners seeking audience, squatted patiently along the wall.

For over two hours Alan waited seeing one man after another summoned. At length when the last of the Moors had ridden away a huge black slave in white, with an enormous silver-hilted scimitar slung by a red sash, appeared at the inner gate and bawled out——

"Let the Nazarene come to my lord!"

Alan rose and was ushered into the inner courtyard where he found the Khalifa Esha Ben Fila seated cross-legged upon a carpet in the shade of an arch. His eyes, pouched and heavy, appeared impassively sullen.

A leather cushion or footstool was lying in the full glare of the sun on which Alan was told to sit. For a minute or two the khalifa feigned to be unaware of his presence continuing to talk in Shilhah—a Berber language of which Alan knew no word—to a scribe who sat at his feet with his horn and paper.

Alan broke in with the orthodox salutation. Ben Fila glanced carelessly at him as one might on noticing a cat in the room, and nodded, mumbling unintelligible answers to the series of greetings. Although boiling with rage inwardly Alan knew sufficient of Oriental ways to simulate calm indifference. At length after the preamble Alan approached the object of his visit. He had arrived the previous day, he explained, and demanded to know why he was not received in the customary manner and given a house for himself and his followers.

"Hast thou letters from the *Makhzen* (Government)?" inquired the khalifa in a level bored tone.

"Nay, it is not necessary," returned Alan, "I have with me a soldier from Kaid Gilhooli, the protection of the kaid."

"There are many soldiers in the empire of the sultan—whom Allah bless!"

"In Fez and Marakesh it was not necessary to have letters."

"The ways of the North are not the ways of the South."

"I demand protection and a house."

"Allah is great! If Allah wills."

"I shall make complaint to Kaid Gilhooli."

"If Allah wills."

"When? Today?"

"If Allah wills!"

The khalifa's eyes had fastened upon a pair of field-glasses slung across the Englishman's shoulders. He bent and whispered in the scribe's ear. Said the scribe——

"El khalifa wishes to see those glasses!"

But Alan knew from the whole attitude of the reception that they were hostile to him; evidently in the pay of the stranger on the black stallion. Alan began to lose control of his temper—a fatal thing in Oriental diplomacy. He knew that the request to see the glasses meant that the khalifa coveted them as a gift; but he was too angry to play out the Moorish game.

"No," he said to the khalifa "they are not for sale," and knowing that the khalifa and Gilhooli hated each other, repeated: "If I am not treated properly I shall return and make complaint to Kaid Gilhooli."

"If Allah wills," returned the khalifa imperturbably.

"The English Government is powerful," supplemented Alan.

"Allah is all merciful!"

Alan without further ado got up and walked out, returning veiled insults with an open one.

AS ALAN rode off he passed three German naval officers mounted on Moorish horses, with an escort of sailors marching like infantrymen. They were the source of his troubles, he reflected savagely. Returning to his camp he sat on the ramparts alongside one of the ancient guns which, ironically, was trained right on the grim little shape of the *Panther* out in the bay.

Whilst he sat there composing a vicious article, scathing in the inference to the lost prestige of England, a German naval orderly approached and handed him a note: an invitation to lunch from the commander of the gunboat. Alan accepted and as he walked down to the beach after a wash, thought what a sardonic sense of humor the Germans had!

The lunch passed off well. Most of the officers spoke English and moreover Alan more than appreciated the table delicacies and wine. Over coffee and cigars the commander gave his version of the reason of their visit which—to Alan's private amazement—consisted in the German commercial interests in the Sus. He was given to understand, he continued, that Alan had met with some opposition or difficulty with the khalifa? The Moors were very obtuse people at times, but the commander would be most happy to offer Alan the protection of his Imperial Majesty the Emperor.

In a flash Alan saw scare-head placards——

"Englishman seeks German protection in Morocco."

With a thin Yorkshire smile he thanked Herr Commander very much for his offer, but regretted that he was unable to avail himself of it.

He was rowed back to the black rock landing-place with a wee small glow of satisfaction that he had managed to circumvent that subtle little move, only to receive checkmate when he arrived at the camp. From the fire a red-capped soldier rose up and briefly informed him that by the khalifa's orders he was to leave the city on the morrow.

"Go to the devil!" Alan exclaimed angrily, and although the Moor did not understand, he cursed him fluently and piously as he turned away.

The sun set behind Cape Ghir in a flood of crimson and purple dying the sea and tinting the gunboat in blood.

Alan moodily contemplated the situation. In the chaos of his mind he remembered Miriam and smiled indulgently as he thought of her silly boasts and idea of women journalists. What indeed could a woman do? Imagine a woman journalist in his shoes now? Good heavens, it was farcical! He would use the episode to shatter Miriam's insane arguments when he got home. Then as the sun dipped and violet twilight wrapped the world a fit of depression seized him. He had been lucky before; this was his first defeat and it seemed bitter, particularly when it might have been the greatest scoop in the journalistic world for years.

"That confounded alien mongrel on the black horse!" was the mysterious special correspondent and the German combined—playing traitor as spies usually did. He was the "German commerical interests in southern Morocco"—the Sus where there was no European trade at all! That conclusion cheered him a little. It would make a scorching article.

A light silvery laugh startled him. He turned sharply to see the hooded figure of a woman, a pair of brilliant eyes twinkling at him above the blanket *haik*.

"Ramah!" he cried as she lowered it.

"*E-eh*, oh, *Roumi*."

"How didst thou come——"

"*S-sh.*" with one henna-stained finger to lips. "I come to warn thee. Come!"

She glided into his tent which sheltered them from the sight of the men around the fire.

"Listen, oh, *Aziz*—" he hardly noticed the endearing term in his excitement—"Es-sid-el-Keleeb and the khalifa, my master—lying in the garden I did hear them talk. If thou are not gone by the morrow they plot to kill thee. But thou must not go."

"Nay, I will not," exclaimed Alan, his pugnacity aroused by the news.

"'Nay but thou must," she adjured him apparently inconsistently, "but only to return, oh, my beloved."

Again the superlative term, which he did not heed. She drew closer to him.

"Wilt thou trust thyself to me?" she demanded.

"Yes, of course," he answered absently in English, thinking hard.

"What sayest thou?"

"Eh? Yea, Ramah, I agree. It is good, little one."

"Listen. Tomorrow thou wilt go, thou and thy servants and make thy camp beside Fonti on the beach."

"*Mezian.* It shall be done. And then?"

"Wait until I come for thee."

"*Mezian,*" he assented and intent upon his professional interests, failed to notice her reproachful eyes as her dim form melted into the shadows.

CHAPTER V

Vast as creation, yet when all is said,
How short the words that make our weal or wo?
What dearer heaven now? What deeper hell?
"I love thee," or "I love thee not" farewell.
And may the mercy of the Lord descend
On Sidi Hammo. Here his song hath end.
—*Sidi Hammo.*

THAT evening as the darkling night swallowed up the plain of the Sus, Miriam uneasily watched Fear put Avarice to flight in the hearts of her Jewish hosts. Yakub had broken faith and told of the scene on the ramparts between Miriam and the baron, with the result that old Yusuf and his pallid wife clamorously insisted that Miriam must depart from Agadir before worse befall or at least that she must leave their house. They feared and hated the baron as the Evil One, and hand in glove with the khalifa; Allah only knew what might not befall them. Miriam offered more money, but with an effort that wrung rheumy tears from the old man's eyes he refused.

Miriam, although fearful of the importunities of the baron, did not intend to leave Agadir in ignominious flight. The more pressing the circumstances became the more tremulously stubborn she grew. She had heard from Yakub, via the *sok*, of Alan's arrival so that she was not surprised to pass him in the streets. She had imagined that he would know her, but when she observed the lack of recognition in his eyes she laughed and passed on intensely amused.

At the first intimation from Yusuf Ben

Musa that she must leave the house, she had naturally thought of taking refuge with Alan whom she imagined to be quite *au fait* with the authorities, as she had observed him embark for the gunboat. But on second thoughts the idea smattered too much of humiliation. Eventually she concluded that it was a choice of two evils—refuge or ignominious flight; so she reluctantly decided to descend upon the unsuspecting Alan next day.

As she sat in the courtyard with little Zara staring at the square of scintillating stars above she tried to console herself—half-defiantly—that whatever happened she had secured the *crème de la crème* of the scoop and wandered mentally to Fleet Street, thinking of herself as the heroine of the hour. Then a thought of the baron who had maintained an ominous silence since the episode, sent a cold shudder of apprehension down her spine. It required little imagination to realize that in such an out-of-the-way barbarous spot many dreadful things might happen to a woman.

In an access of impotent rage she cursed her sex for their inherent weakness. It was all so bitterly unfair. She looked at Zara in the gloom and wondered if it were not better to be of her type, the Oriental woman, frankly a toy for man's leisure moments, dumb, uncomplaining; not dreaming of the liberty and understanding which might and should be theirs.

It was an idea born of momentary weakness of which she felt ashamed the next moment. Yet everything seemed so cruel and heartless, a kicking against the pricks of fate. A passionate desire suddenly welled up within her to cry *peccavi*, to run to Alan and throwing her arms 'round his neck to sob her heart out. She had to set her teeth to conquer the surge of emotion. It passed; she smiled bitterly in the darkness.

At that moment there was a patter of small slippered feet. One of the gollywog little Jewesses rushed excitedly into the courtyard, swinging a candle lantern and crying out upon her father in Hebrew. In a moment Yakub and the rest of the family were gathered in a gesticulating group. Out of the medley of voices Miriam heard Yakub crying at her:

"Thou hast brought this upon us! We are lost!"

Miriam got up and went over to them.

"Eh-eh?" yelled Yakub wildly, waving his palms.

The little girl held the lantern up and pointed a tragic finger at her, screaming shrilly; the old man wrung his hands and the wife literally howled.

It was some minutes ere Miriam could interpret anything intelligible from the hubbub. Then little Zara, the only one who had not lost control of herself, explained that the little girl had just come from the palace with the news that the khalifa had at last discovered the abode of the pretty Jewess with whom he had fallen in love one day in the *sok*.

The baron has executed his threat, thought Miriam. She went very white, for she divined what this might mean.

"And he hath sworn that he will take you into his harem! *Walli—Walli!*" Zara broke out. "They will come for thee, and kill the rest of us! *Walli!* Wo is me!"

There was renewed pandemonium. The upshot was that they were hysterically determined to throw Miriam out of the house then and there to save themselves. Little Zara remonstrated, crying shrilly that Miriam might be hidden away; but this suggestion was met with howls, proclaiming that death was sure if she were not found by the khalifa's people.

Old Yusuf stood by the arch leading to the door; wringing his hands he implored her to go and called upon all the prophets of the Pentateuch; the wife wailed helplessly beside him; the child with the lantern dashed excitedly between Miriam and her father like an erratic dragonfly, clutching at her clothes; whilst Yakub, gibbering with craven fear, hovered about Miriam trying to summon sufficient courage to eject her forcibly. Miriam with faithful little Zara clinging to one arm, defied them—head up and curling lips—in a mixture of Anglo-Spanish *cum* Franco-Arabic.

THEN in the midst of the uproar there was a fresh commotion at the door. Old Yusuf shrieked and was sent flying on to his face; the child dropped the lantern, which spluttered and went out as a group of armed men burst into the courtyard. There was a moment of paralyzed silence. The leader, a tall hawk-faced Arab, peered 'round by the aid of a lantern carried by a negro. Then simultaneously the howls broke out afresh. As

Miriam darted behind a pillar the men swooped upon her. In a trice rough hands seized her. A blanket was bundled over her head. She felt herself lifted by wiry arms. Struggling violently, mad with rage, she was borne swiftly away.

The enveloping blanket produced the suffocation of a nightmare; the powerful arms, that dreadful sense of impotence. Miriam struggled futilely until she collapsed into a limp burden from sheer exhaustion, in which she dimly heard the mutter of voices and scuffle of animals. The sensation of being lifted in the air roused her to another paroxysm. She felt the gentle undulating motion of a horse or mule walking, and the muffled *klop klop* of hoofs upon cobbles.

The journey seemed to last for hours. As her senses began to revive a little she became acutely conscious that the coarse hair of the blanket scratched her face and lips, forcing a pungent acrid taste into her mouth. The chaos of her mind caused by the shock began to clear. Lucid thoughts sped swiftly. She jumped to the conclusion that she was being taken to the khalifa's palace. In a second of time her imagination painted a vivid picture of what her fate would be. She shuddered and groaned with anguish. Wildly she thought of ways to escape; of some method to take her own life rather than . . . .

A nausea overwhelmed her. She lost sense of time and space.

Then after an eternity she became conscious that she was lying on something soft and that the cool night air was fanning her cheeks. She drew a long breath, sighed and opened her eyes. Bending over, his sharp features in the light of a lantern, was the baron.

He must have rescued her then? A feeling of relief and gratitude glowed for a moment. He at least could never be so terrible as a Moor. The baron was holding a glass of brandy which he bade her drink in a curiously low tone. Strange. Miriam wondered, with that irrelevance of thoughts in moments of distress, why his voice was so soft. Like a gentle purr it seemed. She gazed at him and tried to think what was going to happen, but the one idea of the gentleness of his voice seemed to obsess her brain.

He was talking about something, but she could not grasp the sense. Then the alcohol began to take effect. She found her mind coming under control again and began to comprehend what he was saying. Something about regrets for some action. What, for rescuing her? How absurd! She tried to thank him, but found her lips were stiff and swollen. The liquor stung them too.

"You are feeling better?" he inquired.

Miriam mumbled inarticulately.

"So? Allow me!"

Then he bent down and rearranged some of the cushions. How kind he was, the baron! The predominant terror that she was about to fall into the savage Moor's power had for the time driven the baron's character from her mind. Then the association of ideas stirred the memory cells into activity. She sat up, spurred by the idea.

"My God!" she gasped thickly. "Did you kidnap me?"

The baron had put down the lantern—there was no one else in the starlit courtyard—and was sitting beside her. His mouth twisted into that snarling smile.

"If you like," he said shrugging his shoulders, "to put it so crudely. So?" as Miriam made a movement of disgust. "You beautiful little fool," he said bending toward her, "I saved you from a vile fate. That black swine was going to take you. *Herr Gott!* What do you think I have risked for you, *Liebchen?* Everything for you. Eight years have I plotted and schemed for an Empire—*ja,* here in the Sus. It is within my grasp, and *Gott im Himmel,* I play with it—for you!"

He grasped her wrist and kissed her hand. She shrank away from him, but his grip was like a steel trap.

"So?" he snarled. "*Mein lieber Gott,* you lovely fool, I will tame you. *Ja,* I meant to take you, but not until I was ready. Then that *cochon* of a Moor—in two days my boat will be here to take us—us, you angel devil, to Cape Juby where we two will be the German interests in the Sûs. A nice honeymoon, eh, *Liebchen?* But we'll spend the first two days here, so?"

There was a pause. Holding her a prisoner by the wrist he devoured her panting, quivering figure with his eyes. Voices and the clatter of horses sounded some distance away.

"Give me a kiss, *Liebchen!*" he demanded thickly and leaned toward her.

Miriam shrieked and made a frantic effort to tear her wrist loose. He sat back retaining his hold and chuckled as he watched her struggle and scream.

"Shriek, you sweet little devil, you!" he said with an evil smile. "Women's screams are music in Morocco—so! Come! That's enough!" and he drew her to him.

Miriam kicked madly and beat him with the one free hand like the wing of a captured bird.

SUDDENLY came a guttural oath. The baron was lifted bodily from her, releasing his hold at the bidding of the instinct of self-preservation. Miriam fell back panting, wild-eyed, to find the room full of red-capped sodliers, creatures of the khalifa. In a flash she realized that Nemesis had overtaken the baron in the jealous wrath of the khalifa, but that she was reserved for a worse fate. Amid the guttural remarks of the Moors, she saw, in the light of several lanterns, the baron, as helpless as a trussed fowl, his face distorted with rage, in the hands of a gigantic negro slave, who grinned with hellish delight.

A wild thought of self-destruction flashed athwart her mind, but before she had time to recover even her power of speech, two soldiers unceremoniously lifted her by the shoulders and ankles and carried her out. She felt too stunned and helpless to offer futile resistance this time; numbed with awful fear. She was hoisted on to the pommel before a mounted negro. There was the dim scuffle of horses and men, harsh commands and exclamations. Then the cavalcade started forward. Miriam, exhausted and beaten, sobbing, swung limp to the motion of the horse.

As the procession climbed up the dusty narrow streets toward the governor's palace the early morning call to prayer rang out resonant and clear beneath the shimmering stars.

"*Allah—Ak-ba-ah— La illaha il——*"

Miriam did not swoon this time. Her emotions seemed too overworked to respond. Only the gasping sob and the dull ache of choking fear. The flickering lights of the lanterns carried by the slaves on foot, danced ghostlike on the white walls. The dark of the head of her captor was sharply silhouetted against the stars. They seemed to rock and sway giddily. She wondered vaguely why the face was beardless. A cock crowed near by. The muezzin was still chanting.

Allah Akbah—there is no God save Allah!

The stars were blotted out; sounds reechoed loudly under an arch. The stars flashed at her again. The horse stopped. She was lifted down and carried into the gloom of a room. Somebody placed her on something soft and yielding. She did not know what it was; nor care. She ached all over. She felt sick and tired, mentally and physically—oh, so tired and weary. Nothing mattered.

There was somebody moving about her. She wished they would leave her in peace. She seemed to have been ill-used, miserable and tired ever since she could remember. Feebly she wanted to die—but she knew that she could not die because her heart kept leaping within her bosom.

A light flashed in her eyes. She blinked and saw an enormously fat woman leering at her. Huge earrings bobbed under the black hair. She was saying something in Arabic. She handed the lantern to somebody and laid her fat fingers on the shoulder cords of Miriam's robe. The touch aroused her; spurred her into a frenzy, dispelling the mental paralysis, sent a thousand awful thoughts searing her brain. She uttered a soundless scream and half-leaped, half-wriggled, off the bed. She fell on to the floor, scrambled into a corner, crying half-articulately:

"No! No! No! No!"

As the odalisque, laughing hideously, advanced 'round the bed a deep guttural voice sounded behind her. She made some reply, received a curt order and fled.

In the dim light Miriam saw the figure of the khalifa. She watched him with the fascination of a rabbit about to be devoured by a snake. He walked silently across in his bare feet, took up the lantern and advanced toward his victim, stroking his beard and smiling. He said something in Arabic. The proximity of the danger cooled Miriam, made her think with lightning rapidity. She had no means except her hands to protect herself. She was absolutely in this man's power. If only Alan . . . Her soul cried to him for aid.

"*Ana Americana!*" she said desperately, watching him keenly.

He started and peered at her closely. "*Ash?*"

"*Ana—Americana,*" she repeated louder.

Her heart beat faster with wild hope. He spoke quickly, lowered the lantern and examined her. He seemed perturbed and puzzled. Miriam took heart.

"Look!" she cried in English standing up. "I—am—American," tapping her bosom. "American—I—go—Mogador—Sueira—American consul. *Fahamshi?* (understand)."

The word "consul" seemed to convince him.

"*Subhan Allah!*" he exclaimed, and stepped back a pace.

Miriam over-eager, stepped aside.

"La! La!" he said quickly gesturing a negative.

Miriam stopped and stood watching his impassive face, as he gazed at her.

He was thinking swiftly. This girl was as no other woman he had ever seen. She was not a Jewess as he had supposed, but a European. That was no odds, both were infidels, cursed dogs of unbelievers. But the *Roumis* were powerful—here on the coast. There was a *Roumi* war-ship in the harbor: if he took this girl they might retaliate by bombarding the town. They needed an excuse to do so, he well knew.

No, there were many dollars to be had from the *Roumis*. Yet—*Yillah!* The girl was beautiful! He looked at her as a connoisseur. He could retain her for two, perhaps three years, and even then she would still be worth a thousand dollars! And who would know? That son of shame, that pig of an unbeliever Es-sid-el-Keleeb? he would soon be paying for his insult to the beloved of Mahomet. His eyes wandered hungrily over her again. No, by Allah, no accursed Nazarene should stand between him and his desire. He would away to his *Kasbah* in the Sus. The *Roumis*—Allah was all powerful!

Miriam saw the change, saw the fire of passion rekindle in his eyes and nerved herself for an effort—if only to obtain a weapon to kill herself. As he smiled evilly she made a desperate spring to pass him. He caught her by the voluminous sleeve. She hit out wildly and the whole of her soul leaped into the name of her beloved:

"Alan! Al-an!"

The lantern was dropped in the struggle and lay spluttering. An awful minute in which the brute's arms were 'round her, his breath in her face. . . .

MEANWHILE Alan had shifted his camp to the beach near Fonti. Long after sunset the hooded ghostly figure appeared. She had brought a *jellab* for him to wear above his European clothes, a sufficient night disguise. Striking up the hill she led him by a rough and broken path to the northern corner of the city wall, where by a ruined bastion they made entrance into the narrow streets.

Once the tramp and jingle of men and horses drove them to shrink in the dark shadow of a gate. A crowd of soldiers and slaves on foot and horse passed them. The leader, a hawk-faced Arab, made remark as he passed:

"May Allah burn all infidels. That dog Es-sid-el-Keleeb hath surely eaten of our master's sweets. Great will be his wrath, by Allah!"

"What doth he mean, Ramah?" whispered Alan.

"Es-sidi hath taken a hunger for a Jewess, but Es-sid-el-Keleeb hath stolen the bird," answered Ramah. "*S-sh*, let us hasten.

Together they followed the band of night marauders to the khalifa's palace where by a postern gate Ramah admitted Alan to a deserted part of the rambling gardens. Here in a small room she bade him rest whilst she brought food and lights. While he waited patiently in the gloom his thoughts turned to Miriam. Ever since the night before when Ramah had kissed him the image of Miriam kept recurring to his mind. Strange he thought and sought for a reason, but not being practised in emotional analysis it eluded him.

As Ramah returned with a lantern carrying a basket of food the early morning call to prayer rang out from the adjacent mosque. As Ramah approached she seemed to take the form of Miriam.

Her great eyes shone as she set the feast. She brought news that there was a great commotion in the palace as the khalifa was mad with rage at being balked of his prey; and that he had dispatched a force to capture Es-sid-el-Keleeb with orders to send him to his *Kasbah*, ninety miles in the interior, and on pain of death to bring back the girl to him.

Alan felt a sudden fear grip him for Miriam's safety—which was absurd, for Miriam was in London! Yet a voice seemed to whisper:

"Alan! Oh, Alan!"

"What's that?" he excalimed starting up.

But only the cry of the Muezzin answered him.

"What ails thee, oh, *Aziz?*" queried Ramah anxiously.

"Nothing," said Alan, and relapsed into silence, answering Ramah's chatter in monosyllables.

Gradually Ramah's efforts began to thaw him.

Presently as she sat beside him there came the sound of the clatter of a cavalcade. Again he thought of Miriam. He glanced at Ramah. How like Miriam she seemed. He felt a desire to kiss her; her large soft eyes invited him.

Then the sound of a stifled scream brought him to his feet. He listened intently.

"It is but some slave being beaten," said Ramah petulantly, "or mayhap the Jewess I told thee of."

There was a long pause in which Alan felt certain of the proximity of Miriam. He stood at the door, staring into the violet black shadows of the garden.

There came distinct and close, a wild broken cry:

"Alan! Al-an!

Alan dashed madly in the direction, fumbling for his revolver as he ran, hearing, seemingly at a great distance, the voice of Ramah crying:

"Come back to me, beloved! Leave me not, oh, *Aziz!*"

A tall figure in robes stood over Miriam clutching her shoulder with one hand. Alan's face peered amazedly into hers.

"My God, Miriam!" he cried.

"Alan, oh Alan!" she panted.

In the meantime the khalifa had recovered from the shock of the wrench and had summoned his guards.

Alan turned, revolver in hand, to find the room full of slaves and soldiers, mostly armed with scimitars. Thrusting Miriam behind him he covered the khalifa, crying in Arabic—

"At the first move thou art dead!"

The men hesitated and looked at their chief who stood by the bed, glaring at Alan.

"Tell these men to go," Alan continued. "This woman is American—*fahamshi?*

He drew back the hammer of the revolver with an ominous click. The khalifa backed and muttered a rapid order.

"*Nam, sidi,*" chorused the men and filed out. Miriam stood behind Alan, her breast heaving, her eyes devouring his face.

"Sit down and rest somewhere, darling," he said, without turning or lowering his pistol.

She flushed at the endearing term, unconscious upon his part, and obeyed. The khalifa never removed his eyes from the steady revolver muzzle.

"Now," said Alan standing over him like a young god, "either you give us a safe conduct to Mogador—or I go to the Germans. They will blow Agadir to pieces. Choose!"

The khalifa did not hesitate. A mad and armed infidel was not to his liking.

"It is the will of Allah! Thou and the girl shall start at once for Mogador."

"If there is any treachery thou and thy people will suffer for it. Swear!"

"On the beard of my Lord Mohammed, I swear it!" answered the khalifa. "May Allah the All Merciful, the All Forgiving, curse thee," he added piously.

"Go and give orders for our departure," said Alan, lowering the revolver. "And remember thy oath!"

The khalifa departed slowly, retaining his dignity, for which and the absence of whining excuses, Alan forgave him much.

He turned and in the dim light looked at Miriam half-sitting on the edge of the huge bed.

"My God, little woman," he said and took her in his arms.

In a moment or two there was the low throat-laugh of a woman's triumph.

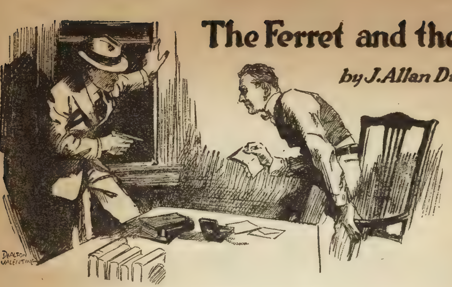
"You great, dear darling," she whispered half-tearfully. "I knew that months and months ago."

But neither noticed the patter of little slippers at the door as Ramah, with a choking sob, stole softly away to the solitude of a roof-top to hide her passionate grief like a stricken fawn.

As the violet wings of the dawn flew before the pageant of the sun, she watched the lovers ride out of the city gate, the khalifa's escort about them. Then she realized dimly that her dream of love was over, the gates of paradise were shut in her face, that she was left to sink into the sordid slough of an odalisque.

The Ferret and the Bet

by J. Allan Dunn



Autor of "The Bully," "The Marooner," etc.

THE "Ferret" could have reported the conversation between the warden and the man from headquarters very accurately, that part of it, at least, that generalized upon himself and the three others who were to leave the penitentiary that morning, having, it was supposed, if not generally practised, fully expiated their crimes and being restored to freedom if not full citizenship. For the Ferret was very, very far from being a fool.

"Once a crook, always a crook!" announced the detective, somewhat wearily. "You wait till they begin coming back to you. I ain't running down your dope or your methods but you're new to the game, if you'll pardon my saying so. There's a heap of improvement needed in penitentiaries, I'll grant you, but all your honor system, your free talk and your baseball games ain't going to make an honest man out of a blown-in-the-glass crook. Do what you will with 'em, they figure the mistake they made was in getting caught, not in the crime itself.

"They come in sore and they go out sore, for all your coddling of 'em. You can't make 'em glad to be here. A man in a cell nurses a grouch and a guy with a grouch ain't going to repent. He may think it pays best to run straight but he gets out and he reads about something good that was pulled off and then he meets his woman or some woman and then some of the gang come around and show him an easy thing. Well—he's sick of prison grub and prison fare and so's his woman of the skimping she's done while he was in. The excitement gets him—and then we get him and you see him registering at your hotel inside of a few months at best.

"Take it from me, Mr. Warden, I know 'em. 'Once a crook, always a crook.' Take the Ferret, first-class cracksman and high-flier, going out today after five years less eight months for behaving himself; he'll be back. I'll bet you a month's pay he'll be back inside of six months, or, if he isn't, we'll be looking for him. Why was he good in quod? Because he wanted to get out of quod. Not because he means to go straight."

"I'll take that bet, Henderson," said the new warden quietly. "Call it an even hundred. You know only the seamy side of human nature. There's a right and wrong side to every man, but you never turn over the goods to have a look at the pattern that was intended to be shown. A crook may be always a crook, but all convicts are not crooks, Henderson. Circumstance, environment, desire of that same excitement you mentioned, the same sort of desire that sent men viking in old times, have a lot to do with it. The Ferret," he broke off to smile, "do you know what the Ferret has been doing and what he wants to do?"

"I'd make another little bet on the last end of it. What has he been doing?"

"Doing wonderful things in my garden and greenhouse. The man is a born genius with grafting and crossing."

"I believe all of that," said Henderson. "Double-crossing and grafting are easy to him."

"And he wants—wait, we'll have him in and ask him."

The Ferret was escorted in. He might have been anywhere between forty and fifty. His hair, that had been allowed to grow since his time of freedom approached, was long enough to be laid back in a smooth gray pompadour. The forehead was well-shaped, the nose well-chiseled and the mouth neither small nor thin-lipped. His eyes—Henderson would have called them cunning—to the warden they were shrewd. He was slight but built with all the suggestive agility of the animal after which the underworld had christened him.

The work among the warden's shrubs and flowers had banished all trace of prison pallor, his cheap, ready-made suit fitted him surprisingly well, he looked not at all like a discharged prisoner, not at all like a malefactor, a wizard at coaxing combinations and blowing stubborner safes—he had used oxy-acetylene on the last one. His hands might have been those of a wood-carver, a musician even, or a master-gardener.

Though Henderson would have set them down as the hands of a forger or a master-cracksman. And he stood respectful with a certain dignity, quite at his ease, the hint of an ironic smile on his lips for Henderson, the gleam of a friendly one in his eyes for the warden.

"What are you figuring on doing, Rogers?" asked the latter in kindly fashion.

"I should like to take up the raising of fancy shrubs, sir," answered the Ferret, ignoring Henderson's grin at his words. "It takes more capital than I have. To go into it properly it would take a thousand dollars before I'd get any return but I'll go at it quietly, if I can get an opening."

Henderson snickered.

"Be careful of the kind of opening you choose, Ferret," he said. "Too bad you ain't got something tucked away to start you out. Now, see here, Ferret, I ain't up here on your account so don't let that worry you."

"I won't, Mr. Henderson."

Henderson flushed a little at the irony. He had been the chief instrument in sending the Ferret up for his stretch but it had not been his cleverness, it had been through the treachery of a stool-pigeon and he felt that the Ferret did not rate his professional acumen over-highly.

"The warden tells me you are trying to go on the level," he said. "You go ahead and raise fancy shrubs all you want, I'll never bother you. But I'm going to be on the level with you. I've made a little bet with the warden here, never mind for how much or how long, that you'll be tapping the tumblers again. Now I'll warn you, I'm going to keep close tabs on you, but I am warning you and if you win I lose."

The Ferret raised his expressive eyebrows.

"That's mighty square of you, Mr. Henderson," he said. "And mighty nice of you to take a chance on me, sir," he said to the warden.

But he made no protestation of his determination or ability to win the warden's bet.

"That's all, Rogers," said the latter, rising. "Good-by and good luck."

They shook hands, warden and ex-convict and the latter passed from the private office quietly, unobtrusive but unslinking and, presently, went out of the Gate of Sorrow and down to the train with the others who had also shaken off the shackles of judgment.

"Want to hedge, Henderson?" asked the warden.

"Not me. Wait till he sees Broadway and a Jane he wants and who wants a flash. You can book that bet."

And the warden booked it.

IT HAPPENED that Henderson got through with his penitentiary business in time to take the same train as the Ferret, whom he found in the smoking-car. Being a sport, Henderson, known to all the trainmen, did not help to make the Ferret conspicuous by even nodding to him but he took a seat across the aisle and a little back of his man, lit one of the warden's cigars and kept a casual, but keen eye on the Ferret.

The Ferret looked out of the window for a while at the green meadows of Westchester County, at the green woodlands, the blue distance, the nigh flowers, the birds, at a butterfly that vagrantly fluttered with the train for a few seconds and there was a look in the eyes that would have surprised Henderson, almost a suggestion of the dew that might still be moist on the ferns in the shady coppices. Then he bought a paper from the news-butcher, a paper and an orange, and glanced at one long-forbidden luxury while he slowly swallowed the other, segment by segment. Suddenly he sat up, absorbed in an item.

Henderson noticed the swift change, noticed the heading of the paper, bought one himself when the boy came through again and read where the Ferret was reading for the second time. There was no dewy look in the Ferret's eyes now, only the hard shine of gray steel. And into Henderson's eyes crept a look of triumph.

"What did I tell the warden," said Henderson to himself, "what'd I tell him. What he's reading is like catnip to an old Tom. He's sore he wasn't in on it. His mouth's watering now, I'll bet. Wonder if I'll get on the case?"

And he settled himself to read the item with professional absorption.

There had been a week-end gathering at the Long Island home of a Wall Street successful broker, whose wife affected the close acquaintanceship of Bohemia. Her guests had many names famous in the Four Arts plus the Art of the Theater and the Roof Garden and there were others more eccentric than famous, a rollicking, unconventional crew who had participated in a fancy-dress dance, starting in the house, transferred to the moonlit, lantern-painted lawn and winding up with an early breakfast at the Country Club.

And the next morning the pearls of the hostess were missing, after many of the guests had departed.

It was not a matter for the police, declared the hostess. Not yet, at all events. They might have been taken in mistake. There had been necessarily a great confusion in the leave-takings and donning of wraps. She hoped, she expected, they would be returned. Followed a detailed description of the necklace of matched pearls with a sapphire clasp.

Henderson bit savagely into the stub of his cigar.

"Bah!" he told himself. "One of the Bohemiam bums hooked 'em. Lot's of 'em 'ud starve if it wasn't for a lot of crazy women who want to entertain 'em. I'll bet she suspects one of them right now. Not a matter for the police? Rot. If some of those spangled poets and paint-daubers was jugged once in a while it 'ud do 'em all good. I wonder—yes, there it is."

He had turned over the sheets to the advertising columns and there in the personals he found what he expected.

$500 REWARD and no questions asked for the return of the pearl necklace owned by a certain hostess and missed yesterday morning after a dance. Apply to Throop & Towne, Jewelers, New York City.

Curiously enough, the Ferret had also turned to that column. But now he was reading the sporting page with zest. Apparently his interest had ceased with the fact that the job had been turned—and turned by an amateur. But Henderson still mentally spluttered.

"—— fool ad. Wrote it herself. Got her husband to put up the five hundred. It's a cinch she not only guesses who it was and wants to cover them but she wants to help 'em out of the mess that put them up to the swipe. Maybe——"

His eyes narrowed as his mind wandered down the devious and dirty alleys that his profession sometimes led him to. An infatuated, foolish woman, a shrewd adventurer, the five hundred an acknowledgment of attempted blackmail and an implied willingness to meet it. Busy husband and idle wife. The old triangle stuff. It was old to Henderson.

Presently he too was deep in the possibilities of war-time baseball. But he kept the Ferret in view when the train got in. The Ferret wandered along almost jauntily, an idler in New York. He bought a gardenia from a police-dodging vender, smelled it and set it in his lapel and strolled on again, the flower utterly redeeming the cheapness of his suit.

At Fifth Avenue he made his way to the library steps and, standing beside one of the supercilious twin lions, a woman met him. She was no taller than the Ferret and she was slender, her clothes giving her a youth that still lingered in her quick, impetuous rush, matched by the Ferret's embrace. Henderson caught sight of a carefully tinted face, that yet did not avoid the Ferret's kiss, of hair carefully made golden, and he smiled as he passed on. He was through with the Ferret for the present. But he felt reasonably sure of his bet. He even pondered as to how he should spend it.

"A painted moll. They all fall for them," he told himself.

He was looking at the only side he knew, the seamy one, he did not guess that rouge and powder and eyebrow-pencils that hide the ravages of time are sometimes the camouflage of love, love that seeks to hold and is a little afraid.

"You're lookin' fine, Jim. Who gave you the gardenia?"

"I bought it for you, Nan. Lookin' great yourself. Let's get out of here. Let's get a regular meal. Somewhere where there's music and singing stuff and dancing."

"Got any money, Jim?"

"Seven dollars, old girl. Enough for eats."

"I've got nearly four hundred left, Jim."

"You wonder! You ain't been starving yourself, have you?"

"Not me. Do I look it? But I moved to a smaller place."

"Good dope. Keep the bunch off for a while."

She looked earnestly at him.

"Don't you want to see them, Jim? I saw Flynn on the street. He told me to tell you he had something good that needed you. They was waiting for you to come out, he said."

"Did you tell him where you was living?"

"No, Jim. He told me where I could find him."

"Good! Nan," he took her arm, "I'm going to cut out all that stuff."

"Jim! You mean it?"

Her voice rang out so that people turned to look at them. The Ferret nodded.

"We'll talk it over later. But I'll tell you this much. I'm going into growing fancy shrubs. Got it all doped out. Remember how I always could make things grow? Remember the first garden we had? You was always good at it too, Nan—brace up, old girl, here's the grill."

She winked back the happy tears that welled and they turned into the grill.

Looking at things dispassionately it seemed as if the chances of winning lay even between Henderson and the warden at that moment.

Later that afternoon the Ferret started down-town to take the Long Island ferry. There was a famous arboriculturist whose plantations and nurseries were located there, close to many of his customers, and the Ferret, who never allowed the grass to grow under his feet, intended to get his prices and other information at first-hand as well as look for a likely piece of land for the leasing.

Just how he was going to tackle the problem of an independent nursery on the three hundred-odd dollars that constituted his and Nan's capital he could not figure out but his consuming energy to get going forced him to a start. Also, at the arboriculturist's he might hear of a job. For the warden had promised to give him references that would not hold the taint of his work having been done in the penitentiary. And, to the Ferret, the warden was a good deal of a surprise and somewhat of a god, a superman, at least, one who never failed in his promises.

WHEN he walked aboard the ferry and made his way forward to the bows, a red-headed, pasty-faced man spotted him and followed him. The Ferret did not see the man, for he walked silently as a cat, until the latter caught him by the elbow and, as the Ferret swiftly slewed his neck to look at him, led the way to the rail.

It was Flynn. Flynn of his old crowd, Flynn who found the plants and did the scouting and preliminary investigation.

"Been looking for you, Jim," said Flynn. "Figured you'd ring up some time tomorrow. I gave Nan the number. But the sooner the better. We been waiting for you to get back. Where you bound?"

"To look at a place on the Island, Flynn. Where you off to?"

Flynn grinned.

"I got a date," he said. "There's a flash maid over at this plant we're figuring on you for, and she and me is keeping company. Where's this dump you're after? Who put you wise to it. Tip from up there, eh?"

"You're a way off, Flynn," said the Ferret. "I'm through."

"Through what?"

"I'm going straight, Flynn."

"The —— you are. Say, what's the idea. You ain't got converted to that Billy Sunday stuff have you?"

"Figure it how you want to, Flynn. I'm through."

The other fell back and studied the Ferret's face, inflexible with purpose. Then he whistled softly.

"You've gone balmy up there, Jim. You'll come out of it after a while, after what you got salted is used up. Nan didn't seem to be extra flush, at that. Say, Jim, you ain't in earnest, are you? Listen, this plant is a cinch. Five thou' apiece in it, easy. Don't be a mutt, Jim. What's your lay?"

"I'll tell you what my lay is, Flynn. I'm sick of this hide-out game. There's nothing in it to offset what you lose. I want to be able to live in one place and know it's mine and it ain't going to be taken away from me and Nan, or me taken away from it. Nan feels the same way about it. She's always wanted to be on the level, Flynn, and I guess she's got something coming to her after my trip up the river."

"Lost your nerve up there?" sneered Flynn.

"No," said the Ferret, looking him straight in the eyes, "I don't believe I have, Flynn. I hope not, I'm going to need it all. But I'm through."

Flynn shrugged his shoulders.

"You know your own business best," he said. "Anyway Nan's got my 'phone number. So long."

He turned away and the Ferret lost him when they took different trains. He looked out at the fields and gardens and the earth seemed calling to him. What he had told Nan was quite true. Things grew for him, he was a born gardener, a real craftsman. A vision of peace grew slowly, of him with his shrubs and Nan with her flowers—she always loved flowers—there were geraniums struggling in the tiny apartment he had just left. But it would be a hard road and he did not yet see the start. And then, timed to his own pulse, the wheels seemed clacking out a rhythm that presently voiced itself persistently.

"Five - thou' - apiece. Five - thousand - easy."

To turn this one trick and then the way would be clear! He saw what he could do with that. Land, a house, tools, young plants in the upturned soil. . . .

He swept the thoughts from his brain and sat frowning until his station was reached.

The big grower was cordial and sympathetic but the Ferret was soon convinced how utterly impracticable was his plan. With war-prices and war-payments he would have to spend all his scanty hundreds for fertilizer alone. The grower offered him a certain credit for plants when he was once established but where was the rent to come from for the land, the dwelling, the living-expenses?

"You say you can get recommendations," said the grower. "I can place you in a job. Good salary. I wouldn't wonder if they could find a place for your wife if she's handy. No kids, you say?"

"No," said the Ferret slowly, "no kids."

"Well, I know they are having a hard time with their help. It isn't far from here, Mr. Rogers. You can tell them I sent you up. They are a bit upset at this time. Had a robbery night before last. But I dare say Mrs. Haskins'll see you."

The Ferret listened to the directions and started for the Haskins place. It would be the best thing to do for the present, especially if Nan got on, and that should be easy. For Nan was more than just handy; she had been a maid when he first met her, much as Flynn was going to meet the girl he mentioned. But there was a peculiar irony in it all. He and Nan, ex-con and ex-con's wife, applying for a job in a place where a pearl necklace had been stolen, for this was the Mrs. Haskins of the news item. It was risky.

If he was ever tipped off of course he had an alibi as to the necklace; no one could accuse a man of robbery who was in jail when it occurred. But every place was risky in a way and, since he had no capital, he could not turn down the first chance. The warden would manage his credentials. The warden did not believe in showing the seamy side of a man who was trying to make good. He would only say that he recommended the pattern.

"Mrs. Haskins is somewhere in the garden," the maid told him, and, if he had come about a gardener's position, he might as well see her there.

So the Ferret trod the walks between trim lawns and flower-beds, through a rose garden and so down, as directed by a man who was handling watering-hose, to a terrace backed by a yew hedge, high as the Ferret's head.

He walked along the hedge toward the gap of its entrance on to the terrace, screened himself by masses of shrubbery, and his trained ears caught the syllables of earnest talk and, from a nature not yet subdued, listened with the habit of his recent profession.

"So, when I saw the news in the paper this morning, Helen, I made up my mind to come over and see what could be done. I got up late but I came as soon as I could. I'm terribly sorry about it."

Now the Ferret had learned to read men in many ways, by looks, by apparently trivial actions and by the intonations of the voice. This voice sounded frank, sympathetic as it was cultured, but there was a purring quality to it that made the Ferret distrust its owner before he saw him, and feel sure that his suspicion was well placed. It was the voice of a man accustomed to talk much with women—a voice that could flatter readily and did—that could charm and woo, the voice of a stage-lover.

The woman's voice was harder to interpret. It held a hint of fear, a hint of insincerity, or of fence, but it was charming. And the Ferret, rooted suddenly, still listened.

"Did you see the reward I offered, Clinton? Harry was very kind about it. He offered to make it more but I thought it was enough. And I want my pearls back, Clinton. I love them. The money does not matter so much but they were Harry's wedding-gift to me and I want them."

The insincerity, or whatever it was, left the voice as she spoke of her desire for the gems. Then it came back.

"Can you suggest anything, Clinton?"

"I can't. I'm a dub at such things. I suppose you might double the reward if you don't get any response. The necklace is worth much more."

"It cost ten thousand dollars. But—whoever took it—would not be easily able to dispose of it, Harry says. Mr. Throop, the jeweler, told him that the pearls would lose value immediately they were separated or sold unmatched, and of course the full description was in the paper."

"Yes. But I think I should double that reward tomorrow."

The Ferret did not shift his position but his eyes hardened and his fists clenched.

"Clinton," went on the woman. "Do you remember you promised to return to me those two letters I sent you. They did not mean anything. They were just foolish letters but Harry—won't you let me have them?"

"I will, tomorrow, Belle. If there is nothing else I can do, I'll be getting back on the 5:50. That is, if you're not going to ask me to stay to dinner."

He laughed as he spoke.

"No, it isn't convenient tonight, Clinton."

"If I were you I'd telephone to those jeweler people and also to the paper, doubling that reward. I think it will bring results. You say your husband was willing to increase it. And I'll send you those—foolish—letters you speak of."

The Ferret looked at his cheap but competent watch. It was 5:30 and the station was a full mile back. He intended to catch the 5:50. The job—could wait. The man and the woman moved on. Doubtless they were going back to the house. The Ferret ambuscaded behind the shrubs, glimpsed the graceful figure and pretty face of the woman and paid especial attention to the man, a handsome, somewhat haggard chap, faultlessly dressed, who passed on with a covert smile as he passed out of sight.

Within a hundred yards of the station a car sped by the hurrying Ferret and in it sat the man whose first name was Clinton. He got out at the station and the car returned toward the Haskins place.

Up-town, and later, the man whose first name was Clinton descended from the elevated in the nineties and walked to the door of a bachelor-apartment house which he opened with a key. He entered. A minute later the Ferret inspected the small foyer and noted a card that read:

Clinton Howard Bowdin. Apt. 8.

He looked at the rest of the names, apparently comparing them with an envelop he carried, frowned and crossed the street, seemingly looking at numbers.

But he glanced back at the house he had left, quite casually. It was dark and some of the windows were already illuminated.

"Apartment eight," mused the Ferret. "That should be on the top floor back. Seven is in front. No one home there."

He walked up the street and back again slowly. Three doors from the house that

Clinton Bowdin had entered was one evidently vacant—"To Let" signs in its windows.

NAN greeted the Ferret expectantly. Supper was ready for him. "The first home meal, Jim," she said. "Any news? Or do you want to keep it until after supper?"

"No news, old girl," he said. "But prospects. And I have to go out after supper."

She did not question him but, after he had gone, she went into the bedroom where he had been rummaging in a closet and herself reached down a box on the back of the shelf. Hardly knowing she carried it she bore it into the next room and sat down heavily with the box on her lap. Her face was old now, old and pinched between the lines, and gray.

"He has taken his keys and his gun," she repeated to herself over and over as she rocked, her face a mask of dread—dread and sorrow.

THE Ferret entered the doorway of the vacant house like a shadow and deftly set in the lock a twisted piece of tempered wire. A little pull, a pause, a quick thrust and a turn and the lock slid, the shadowed door opened and closed again.

Two minutes later the scuttle leading to the roof lifted and the Ferret emerged, keeping well back from the front coping and making his swift and subtle progress over the roofs. He tried the scuttle-hatch of the house that stood the third below and found it tightly fastened from within. Hardly visible in the gloom, he glided to the back of the roof, peered over, tested a gutter, let himself down with the agility of a gymnast, swinging to his hands, and dropped without noise on to the top landing of a fire-escape.

The landing was outside a room before whose window a blind was drawn, almost to the bottom, all but an inch. The Ferret bent—looked through.

Handsome Clinton Bowdin was seated at a table gazing at a lustrous string of pearls clasped by a sapphire.

"Wondering if she's doubled that reward," the Ferret told himself. "He's figuring on getting up early tomorrow to see that paper. But he can't cash in until the jeweler opens."

He stood upright, struck silently a safety-match, showing the barest glimmer through his shielding fingers while he briefly surveyed the latch of the window. With the precision of an expert he inserted something between the sashes upward, gave a twist to the handle of the instrument and the catch was sprung with the tiniest of clicks. Within, Bowdin did not move.

The Ferret nosed the breeze, almost imperceptible, tried its strength with a wet finger and then a loosely held bit of paper.

He eased up the bottom sash with the tool that had started the catch and, inch by inch under his wide-spread fingers, quick to sense any lack of balance, the lower pane moved upward, back of the blind.

Bowdin put back the necklace into its case and took up two letters that he read through with a sneering smile.

"Cheap at the price," he said. "The little fool to— Hell!"

He jumped to his feet as the spring blind rushed up and flapped about its roller. Coming through the window was a slight man of whose face nothing could be seen but a resolute chin and two eyes, hard as steel, showing through a mask. One remarkably steady hand held an automatic aimed for Bowdin's heart.

Bowdin did not move.

"I'll put up my hands if you want me to," he said. "But you've come to the wrong apartment. I am broke, my murderous friend, always, perennially broke. Nothing worth your while shooting for. Besides the house is full, some one might hear the shot."

"You wouldn't," said the Ferret. "You'd see the flash and feel the smash of the bullet and that would be the end of you. I'll look out for myself afterward. But I'll shoot."

Bowdin turned pale, sweat broke out on his forehead and the fingers of his hand on the table trembled. The brutal description and the tone that backed it had broken his bravado.

"What do you want?" he said in a low voice.

"The necklace you were admiring. Don't move!"

He shoved the automatic forward so that its grim muzzle brushed the serge of Bowdin's coat and picked up the case with one hand, sliding it into his own pocket. Then he took up the letters.

"What do you want those for? They are private letters."

"Same thing you wanted them for. Now, Mr. Bowdin, don't start anything after I go. I'm going out the front way. It might be awkward for you to explain how you got that necklace. Get me?"

He deftly ran his hand over Bowdin in a search for a weapon.

"Now then," he said, "you climb out that window on to the fire-escape. Go on."

With a glance of furious but futile resentment Bowdin obeyed.

"You can break the glass after a while if you can't open the sash like I did. Or you can climb down and stir up the janitor. Good night."

He pulled down the pane and set the catch, leaving the discomfited Bowdin glaring at him through the glass, went down the stairs, opened the front door-latch and passed into the street, confident that he would not be followed.

Nan looked up with a white face and red-rimmed eyes as he entered and tossed the jeweler's case into her lap.

"Jim," she said. Jim! You said——"

"Nan. There's a reward of one thousand hung up for this and no questions asked. I fell on to it. The thousand means everything to us just now. I turned down Flynn's job, though there was five times the amount in it. The people who put up this reward won't miss a thousand as much as we would ten cents. A cheap thief swiped it and I took it from the thief. I took something else from him, two letters a woman would give the thousand for without a murmur."

"You said you'd go straight, Jim. I was so happy till I saw what you'd taken from the box."

"We'll chuck them all in the river to-morrow, Nan, after I get the thousand."

"But it's stealing, Jim. Stealing and blackmail."

"Where do you get that? I ain't selling the letters. I ain't read 'em and I ain't going to. I'm sending 'em back. I didn't take the necklace. Luck chucked it my way when I most needed it and I'm going to get that thousand."

His face was dogged.

"Jim, it's just the same. You didn't earn the thousand."

"The —— I didn't."

"Jim, I'll put it to you this way. Maybe I don't put it well but I know it ain't straight. Which way would the warden look at it?"

The Ferret flushed. He sat down with a straight line between his brows. Then he laughed.

"The warden! If the warden knew he'd figure he'd lost his bet, I reckon."

"How's that, Jim?"

And he told her of the wager.

MR. THROOP, senior partner of Throop & Towne, Fifth Avenue jewelers, looked in perplexity at the slight, gray-headed man who sat opposite him in his private office. Between them the Haskins necklace lay on the leather-topped desk like a coiling snake.

"You say you don't want any reward?" he asked. "But the money is here. I give you my word the matter goes no further."

The Ferret shook his head.

"Won't you leave your name—confidentially? This is most extraordinary. Do you realize the necklace is worth ten thousand dollars?"

"Yes, I realize that, Mr. Throop. But you are breaking the compact."

"What compact?"

"No questions asked. Good morning, sir."

Outside the store the Ferret dropped a letter in a mail-box. It was addressed to Mrs. Belle Haskins of Long Island and marked "personal." As he turned away, some one tapped him on the shoulder and he whirled.

"Hello, Ferret," said Henderson." What are you doing in Throop & Towne's?"

"Pricing diamonds with Mr. Throop," said the Ferret. "If you don't believe me, ask him."

Henderson looked at him with a half-grin.

"You're a foxy one, Ferret, but I've got my eye on you. I'm going to collect that bet."

"Will you do me a favor, Mr. Henderson?"

"What is it?"

"Just how much did you bet with the warden about me?"

The detective looked at him quizzically.

"A century. Why? Want to pay it for the warden?"

"I might. I'm going up to see him this afternoon."

He walked off, leaving Henderson looking after him in a muddle of speculation. Presently the detective shadowed him, the Ferret perfectly conscious of the operation. And, when Henderson, flashing his badge, asked his question at the ticket office, the puzzle on his face deepened at the answer.

"Ossining. Round trip."

In the train the Ferret skinned off his roll. Five twenties he put in his vest pocket, the balance, a little over two hundred and seventy dollars, he returned to his hip.

"I'LL tell you what I think of it, Rogers," said the warden as he handed the Ferret a cigar. "I should like to meet that wife of yours. I wish you'd arrange it."

"Why, of course, I'm proud to, sir."

"For one thing I want to ask her if she considers I've lost this bet to Henderson. Because I'm not at all sure about it myself, Rogers, and her vision is rather wonderful. So you had better keep the hundred till we talk it over. I've been thinking about you, Rogers. How would you like to have me as a business partner?"

"Why—why?"

The Ferret gasped and choked.

"I've got a thousand or so I could invest in, say the fancy shrub business, Rogers. Like to go into it?"

"You'd trust me?"

"I'd trust you and that wife of yours, together, anywhere, Rogers. You've won your own best bet."

In the eyes of the Ferret, riding through Westchester County in the early evening, was a look that might have suggested the dew on the ferns in the shady coppices that graced the verdant hills. And a vision came again, to stay, a vision of upturned earth and the balm of shrubs, of fragrant flowers, and, tending them, himself and Nan.

BLIGHTY

BY TALBOT MUNDY

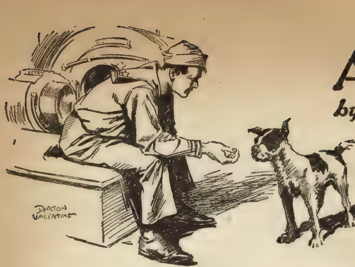
THE derivation of "Blighty" is as simple, really, as the origin and meaning of Theodore Roosevelt's nickname given him by the natives of East Africa. In spite of the fifty various explanations given in the papers, "Tumbo" means "stomach," neither more nor less. And "Blighty" means England. It is one of Tommy's adaptations from Hindustani—a language he twists and changes to suit himself when in India and, when time-expired, brings home in fragments with which to adulterate the ever-growing English language.

Originally the word is *vilayti*, which means European. But since the only section of Europe, and the only Europeans with whom the vast majority of natives ever come in contact are England and the British, by inference the word has come to mean British almost whenever used. *Vilayti pani*—European water—soda water. So much for the native standpoint.

Adapting that, Tommy gets Blighty tobacco, as distinguished from the local article, Blighty clothing, Blighty letters, Blighty leave, and—last of all—he "goes Blighty" when the troopship takes him home. So "Blighty" is England; and to "wish you a Blighty one" is to hope that when you are wounded it will be a severe enough case to take you to England, without "sending you West."

The daily swelling war vocabulary is full of similar instances. "Rooty," for the bread ration, is simply Hindustanee *roti*—bread. "Treck," meaning to move in any way on wheels, is the Boer word *trek*—travel. To "keep a dekko lifting," meaning to keep a sharp lookout, is from the Hindustani imperative *dekko*—look.

Before ever he "napooed" a man Tommy in the old days would *nayhai* him, and that is from the Hindustani *ne hai*, meaning is not. Of all the other scores and scores of words that Tommy has brought home from Indian campaigns, perhaps the oftenest used is "go arsty" for "go slow"—simply the Hindustani word *ahsti*—softly, gently.



Arab

by Roy P. Churchill

Author of "The Welding," "A Shift Into Reverse."

SOME recruiting officer, anxious to fill out a draft, wished Singleton Smith on to the Service. He was healthy, cornless, with a mouth full of teeth, and may have looked like good raw material, but as a "flat-foot" he was a flat failure. He wouldn't drill, he wouldn't work, he wouldn't mix, and worst of all he wouldn't keep himself clean

"He's a plain bum," said "Slim" Higgins. "One of the kind that knocks at back doors and leaves a tomato-can on a fence-post when he crosses a creek. About as much chance to make a sailorman of him as to beat the boatswain cussin' when there's a foul anchor."

Slim Higgins and Dick Reasoner sat on their respective ditty-boxes, smoking black cuddy pipes, and discussed this new puzzle to the training-ship *Dixie*. It was Wednesday afternoon, rope-yarn Sunday, with drill over, smoking lamp lighted, and nothing to do until supper.

"Uhuh," answered Slim's companion, "but you overlooked one point."

"Shoot it, then," said Slim. "It'll be the only thing that anybody noticed if it's anything good. This guy thinks that water is the root of all evil."

"Well," said the other, shifting his pipe over, "he enlisted, didn't he? Had to volunteer to do it. What made him join if there wasn't some good in him?"

"Needed a meal-ticket," scoffed Higgins.

"Maybe so, but I have looked him up. Here he is right here."

Carefully Reasoner pulled from his blouse a small, well-thumbed dictionary, and turning to a page, put his blunt brown finger on a word. His shipmate watched him without amusement.

"Listen-to-reason" Reasoner's well-known pet hobby was sacred and had a way of working out most unexpectedly.

"Upheaval," he read: "A lifting from below; a lifting of strata by some internal force."

"What's strata?" asked Slim. "Sounds like a Japanese cuss-word."

Reasoner turned the pages swiftly.

"I've looked it up, but forget it," he apologized. "Here she is: an artificial layer."

"You've hit it," said Higgins, "it's a layer of dirt. But just to be a sport, I'll bet you a new, hand-sewed white hat that "Hobo" Smith, if he is an 'upheaval,' gets upheaved over the side before he makes a sailorman. There goes the mess call. You can work on these hopeless specimens all you want to, but me, I'm findin' it hard enough to punch a little sense into the likely ones."

The *Dixie* had just cleared Hampton Roads for a six-months' training cruise. Smith with ten others had come aboard at the last moment without the usual stay at the receiving-ship. He was labeled landsman for detail, which meant that his duty was anything from cook's striker to passing coal.

The first morning at inspection the division officer pounced on Smith. His uniform, new, stiff and ill-fitting, was terribly dirty.

He had been peeling spuds for the cook, and had not changed.

"You look like a hobo," cried Lieutenant Thorne.

For the good of the division it was well to make an example in the beginning, and Smith afforded a glaring opportunity.

"What do you mean coming to quarters looking as if you had just crawled from under a freight-train? Go to the barber and get that shag of hair cut. Go to your bag and get a clean uniform. Go get some water and wash your face."

"Yes, sir," humbly answered Smith, making a ragged salute, without embarrassment, though all his shipmates were grinning at the bawling out. "What then?"

"Go to the devil," laughed the lieutenant insolently.

Hobo shuffled off without a sign of resentment. He had been named. He was a yellow cur as well. His shoulders drooped. His feet dragged. If he had owned a tail, it would have been between his legs.

A week in the galley and the cook complained.

"I can't stand the smell of him around the place," he growled to the first lieutenant. "I've threatened to take the butcher-knife to him, put lye in his soup, scald him. It all does no good. He gets dirtier and dirtier. Even when we're cooking onions, I get him strong when he's to windward."

The first lieutenant took one look at Smith and transferred him to the deck force.

"See what you can do with him, Mr. Thorne," was his instruction, and that officer put Hobo Smith up to Dick Reasoner.

On a training-ship there are many difficult problems. Men of varied temperament and training are to be fitted in, adjusted, molded into a compact working unit of force, where before they had been individuals, each with a more or less pampered ego. Some must learn obedience, unselfishness, the curbing of self. Others must throw off timidity, expand into men, become assertive of their rights.

For this task the officers and men of a training-ship are carefully picked. Slim Higgins was a master at signals. Henry Cowles knew knots, and splicing. Jimmy Wade handled the boats, and so on down the list, each petty officer and seaman a specialist in his line.

Dick Reasoner was known on more ships than the *Dixie*. With his appeal to the dictionary he had helped out many a man now serving in his proper place, happy and contented, who had started on the quick downward road which leads to the stone frigate and a bobtail discharge. Hence the men called him "Dictionary Dick," but had a profound respect for his advice, and sought his help in trouble.

Reasoner's peculiar talent ran to men. He knew them, studied them, loved them. On other ships where the saying was "Tell your troubles to the marines," on the *Dixie* it was "Tell your troubles to Dictionary Dick." He was large, slow-moving, older-looking than his thirty-five years, with quick sympathetic eyes and heavy angular features. Not a good-looking man, but strong-jawed, patient, cool. Just the sort of man who makes a judge in civil life, and a master-at-arms in the Navy. Reasoner was an ex-apprentice and had served since he was eighteen. He was the official smoother-out of tangles, the last appeal in difficult cases, one who led much and drove little.

Lieutenant Thorne smiled a little as he told the master-at-arms to take charge of Hobo Smith. Reasoner smiled in return.

"Do what you want to with him," said the lieutenant. "I believe the captain wouldn't grumble if you shot him at sunrise, or pushed him overboard some dark night. That would be about all I could think of. Perhaps you may find a way to deal with him out of the dictionary."

The lieutenant smiled some more, but Reasoner did not.

"Everything is in the book," he said simply. "Maybe there's a cure for Smith."

THE crew wondered what course Reasoner would take in an effort to make a change in Hobo, and did not have long to wait. At first came a short interview.

"What's your name?" he asked.

He spoke with the same drawl that his height and his slow manner indicated, but with a certain alertness in his eyes, which those few who lied to him knew meant an intent keen perception, before which pretense always failed.

"Hobo Smith," said the other, shamelessly.

"Between us from now on it will be your

real name," said Reasoner. "Your name is Singleton Smith. It's a good name. Somebody gave it to you who had high hopes of your being an honor to it. You gave it when you swore to follow the rules of the Navy. That's all the lecture. I'm going to make a valet out of you, Singleton. You're going to valet yourself. That's one thing the Service insists on.

"Every man here, that is fit to associate with other men, scrubs his body and his clothes. I've roped off a little space up there in the manger. You will take your bag, hammock, ditty-box and yourself there and stay there. If anybody speaks to you, I'll put them on the report. Your business is to watch the other men, and scrub yourself and clothes. Any morning you fail to do it, you fail to eat."

"You put it to him strong," said Slim Higgins. "What's the idea? If he had a spark of manhood in him as big as the point of a sail-needle, he'd a climbed your frame."

"Isolation," said Reasoner. "Everything else has been tried. If it brings about 'reflection' it may let him get the best of this upheaval of strata from beneath."

"Too deep for me," sighed Higgins. "Beanin' him with a marline-spike is more to my notion."

The novelty of having a man confined on the forecastle, to whom they were not to speak nor communicate with in any way, soon wore off the crew. Hobo Smith became as much a part of the deck gear as the bitts or chains. Men remembered not to speak to him, and then formed the habit and forgot to speak.

When the cook came with the food, he whistled and then shoved the plate toward Smith with his foot. Under Reasoner's direction he rigged up his own lines for scrub and wash clothes, and still under Reasoner's directions he washed and scrubbed. At the end of a week his outfit was fairly clean.

Then Reasoner did not show up for two mornings. Hobo scrubbed the first day and shirked the next. On the third day at Reasoner's appearance Hobo had made no start toward washing, while all around him the men were bathing and preparing to scrub their clothes.

Reasoner was not impatient.

"I hate to keep a man penned up like a dog," he said, "and so I let you have a chance. You could have joined the division, Singleton, but I guess a man takes a long time to break a bad habit."

Without being told, Hobo took his bucket and went for water for his scrubbing. True to his word, Reasoner had the cook take only water to the prisoner that day.

Another week and the ship was in port, and the men going ashore on liberty. The whole forward divisions held Hobo Smith in open contempt. They referred to him as the "life-termer," but knew that once a home port was reached he would be discharged as undesirable. None of this seemed to reach Smith. In his pen forward he was carelessly indifferent, and his only real discomfort was the daily scrubbing under the eye of Reasoner. Then Reasoner went ashore for a day, and found that Smith had missed the scrubbing again.

"The man seems to have no sense of honor," said Lieutenant Thorne to the first lieutenant. "Reasoner seems to have failed in his cure this time."

"He is at least keeping him from infecting the ship," said the first lieutenant. "Why not have a marine watch him when Reasoner is away?"

At the next port when Reasoner went ashore, Lieutenant Thorne asked for the marine sentry, and Hobo Smith found himself under the eyes of another master. With Reasoner there had grown up a little morning routine which never varied. It had been "Good morning, Singleton," and from a sullen silence, Smith had begun to say "Good morning." Never had there been, except on the first morning, any other order to begin work. Smith had commenced as soon as Reasoner appeared.

"Get busy, you scum," ordered the sentry.

Smith looked the marine over and did not answer.

"Work or you don't eat," taunted the sentry.

But Smith sat down on the deck with his back to the other and refused to scrub. That day he had only water.

Reasoner was pleased when he returned.

"It's a hopeful sign," he said to Slim Higgins. "The word is 'defiance'. It's a thirty-third cousin to self-respect. If a man has it, he may have better qualities."

"Let us hope so," said Slim. "But billy-goats are long on that defiance stuff, too."

Dick Reasoner knew that he could not keep Smith confined in his little pen for an indefinite time. He interfered in some measure with the freedom of the already crowded forecastle, and unless he could show results some other method of dealing with the man would have to be tried. The way came unexpectedly.

Ashore again, seeing the sights with his friend Slim Higgins, a poor, half-starved puppy, wandering drunkenly on its weak legs across the pavement, was shoved off into the gutter by a careless foot, which had just missed stepping on it. The little dog whined pleadingly, with its front paws on the curb, as it tried vainly to drag itself back.

Slim Higgins went on by, but Reasoner stopped.

"Looks like he's homeless," he said, indicating the dog, which redoubled its puny efforts to climb to the sidewalk, as it saw some one had noticed it.

"Come on," said Slim, "I'd think you had enough pets on your hands with that hobo on the ship."

But Reasoner had extended a big hand and helped the puppy back to firmer footing.

"I'm going to take him along," he announced. "He'll get run over and killed, anyway."

Buying a newspaper he wrapped the dirty little dog in it, carried him out to the ship, fed and washed him, and took him for an airing near where Hobo Smith sat and looked idly out to sea. Smith had failed to scrub again, and was doing another "water only" day.

"Hello, Singleton," greeted Reasoner, and sat down on a chest where he could watch developments.

"Howdy," answered Smith obediently, his eyes following the wandering puppy. "Whose dog?" he asked, snapping his fingers to the playful little waif.

"I found him looking for a home," said Reasoner, "and so I brought him along. The first lieutenant has given permission to have him in the first division. I've named him A-rab, which the book says is a homeless outcast."

"Airedale," said Smith. "Oughter make a fine dog."

Smith was showing more interest than at any time since he had been on board. The little dog had climbed into his lap.

REASONER'S plans crystallized instantly.

"You can keep him up here with you," he said. "You've made friends mighty quick. Let him share your rations until he gets bigger." Reasoner got up as if the matter was settled. "Singleton," he said, "after this week you go to regular duty."

Smith knew from the tone what he meant. He was to have a chance to make good, and the dog was the prize. Smith loved dogs. He had a queer influence over them. Back during the old days on the road he walked fearlessly up to the most savage ones and made friends. Something deep in him that was almost dead came feebly to life. He smiled at Reasoner, with his hand still stroking the sleeping puppy.

"Thanks," he said, "you're a good old scout."

Smith took his place in the division humbly. The first morning at inspection Lieutenant Thorne had him step from ranks and turn 'round.

"Get a better fit next time," he said, for Smith's uniform was clean, and his shoes shined, and there was no fault to find.

But Smith's place was not an easy one. He was behind on the drills, slow at his work, looked down upon by his shipmates. The only thing that he did do well was to scrub clothes, and look after Arab, the Airedale puppy, who had begun to put on the shaggy coat of his breed.

"That pup's got sense," confided Slim Higgins to Reasoner. "The little microbe knows who's a friend to his master, and who is not. You let me go within a yard of him and he backs off and growls, but he lets you handle him most as easy as Smith."

Pets are popular on a ship, and the men soon found that to win the dog's favor they must speak civilly to his master, and Hobo Smith made a few friends, while he steadily improved in his work. But when he drew up a ditty-box on a Wednesday afternoon to a group playing cards, he was never asked to take a hand. No one shared their tobacco with him. If he ran out of soap before the monthly small stores were issued, he could only borrow from Reasoner.

In the groups that went ashore he traveled alone, so far as human company was concerned, but accompanied always by his dog. As time went on and Arab grew rangy and long-legged, Smith kept with him more and more, and began to seek less and less to establish a place for himself with the crew.

Reasoner had it out with him many times.

"What you want to do is to get a transfer to some other ship. This bunch here sized you up wrong in the beginning, and they can't see that you've changed. Son, there's a word for you here in the book that'll tell the whole story. It's 'forfend.' It means to ward off. By getting away you'll escape all this criticism of what you used to be."

"Maybe you're right," said Smith. "I'd like to get away from this bunch, but there's the dog. If I go, Arab will have to stay on. He's mine, but another ship might make me give him up. I can stand most anything for Arab." And the dog beat a tattoo on the deck with his tail in answer.

One of Smith's most persistent enemies on the ship was Engle, a huge recruit coal-passer. He systematically nagged and goaded both Smith and his dog, smearing up Smith's paint work with his greasy hands, and kicking at Arab whenever the occasion offered. His hobby was shark fishing, and most every hour off watch, he was in the forecastle with a line off the side. He had found out from the complaints of the others just the part of the ship that it was Smith's duty to scrub, and usually took his station there.

Smith and his dog were playing tag the next morning when Engle came forward. They drew aside to let him pass. The coal-passer had been unable to secure bait at the galley, and a brilliant scheme to settle two scores came to him as he saw the dog. Without a word he stepped quickly forward and grasped the puppy by the neck.

"Let him be, you'll hurt him," resented Hobo Smith angrily.

"Shut up, you bum," retorted Engle. "I'm going to make shark bait of this pup."

The dog hung snarling and twisting from his hand, trying vainly to get a hold with his teeth.

"Let him go," cried Smith, and made a dive for the dog.

Engle, much larger and stronger than Smith, let him come on until he was in close, and then holding the dog out of reach, sent his fist crashing into Hobo's face, who in his anxiety over the dog, had not tried to guard himself. The blow knocked him backward over a ditty-box, and he did not get up. Not until then did the dog whine, and redouble its efforts to bite the hand that held it.

Holding the squirming puppy between his knees, Engle lashed it firmly to the big shark hook, and going out on the boat-boom, threw his line overboard. Half a dozen men yelled to the big coal-passer to haul the dog back aboard. Arab had made some friends, and after they were sure that Engle was not joking, they made protest, but Engle defied them.

"Dog's no good, anyhow," he said, "and the first fellow that tries to do anything I'll knock him off the boom to help feed the sharks."

As the men hung back, Reasoner came running forward. The little dog was swimming valiantly with the heavy hook, but looked about spent. Instead of shouting to Engle, Reasoner climbed out on the boom.

"Shame on you," he cried, "haul that pup in!"

Engle did not intend to back down in the face of those watching, so he took the fish-line in the hand that held to the boom's supporting stay, and faced Reasoner defiantly.

While all eyes were centered on Reasoner and Engle, no attention was paid to Hobo Smith. He crawled dizzily to his feet, saw what was going on, lurched to the rail and leaped overboard to the rescue of his pet.

Engle was the larger of the two men on the boom, and had the advantage of position because he held to the stay, which came down at an angle of forty-five degrees from the ship's side to the end of the boom. He could reach it for support, while Reasoner could not, who had only the slack life-line. As Reasoner advanced Engle saw an opportunity, and untied the life-line from the stay, hoping to throw his antagonist off by swaying it sidewise, but Reasoner cut the line behind him, and threw it aside, coming at Engle without support, balancing on the narrow spar.

He had lost the slowness which characterized his usual manner. His loose body was tense, catlike, and every movement quick and sure. Foot by foot he advanced on the coal-passer. Engle tied the fish-line to the stay so that he could have both hands, and shook the boom in a final effort to throw Reasoner off.

"Haul in," ordered Reasoner, who had reached striking distance.

Engle's answer was to take a firmer grip of the stay and kick out with both feet.

Reasoner dodged backward, balancing himself on the shaking boom, and acted on the suggestion that Engle had given. Before the coal-passer could quite recover, Reasoner had rushed, and instead of striking him and both men going overboard, he leaped into the air and caught the stay well over Engle's head. Then hanging from his hands he kicked the other man off the boom. Not until then did the master-at-arms see that Hobo Smith had reached the dog, cut the fish-line with his knife, and with Arab resting on his shoulder, had made the gangway, and was climbing out of the water.

The assembled ship's company had seen the whole affair, and from it they knew that Hobo Smith would fight anybody, and dare most anything to save his dog, and that Dick Reasoner would back him up. Engle swam to the gangway, climbed up, and went below. He had a bump on his cheek the size of an egg where one of Reasoner's shoes had landed.

From then on Hobo Smith had more assurance. The men treated him with more respect. He had been licked of course, but he had shown fight against a larger man.

THE next morning at the deck court Engle was given five days bread and water for punishment. The first lieutenant had arrived on the scene in time to see the wind-up, and a full explanation had to be given by Reasoner. This was the beginning of bad times for Engle. A few weeks later he picked a quarrel with a fireman while on watch, struck the man over the head with a shovel, and was given a summary court-martial with three months loss of pay, and thirty days' confinement.

"That dog of yours is to blame," whispered Engle to Smith. "When I get out of here, I'm going to poison him."

And Smith, his newly-found manhood sitting uncertainly on his soul, while he fought the prejudice of the crew, and all his heart wrapped up in the beloved Arab, believed the threat.

The fireman that Engle had struck did not do well in the hospital. He took a sudden change for the worse. Engle's case became more serious. His thirty days up, he was still confined. If the man died, he would be held for murder. Again he found a chance and whispered to Smith.

"Help me to get away, or I'll kill the dog."

Just how he intended to do it while confined in the brig he did not explain, but Smith was interested only in Arab's safety. He asked no questions. The big coal-passer would find a way, and the dog, now almost full grown, was growing more precious to him each day.

The next day as Engle passed, he repeated his warning, and Smith asked—

"How?"

During the next few days Engle outlined a plan. The two could only speak a few words as the prisoner passed forward for his morning exercise, but at the end of the week Engle was gone. The master-at-arms had locked him in, after giving him his supper, and the marine sentry, coming on watch at eight o'clock, had found the brig empty. The ship was searched from stem to stern, but the prisoner could not be found, which was not surprising, since the steam launch had made a regular trip at seven.

The first lieutenant summoned Reasoner.

"This is a serious matter, Master-at-arms. I have just had a report from the hospital that Riley's condition is critical, and here we let this coal-passer get away. There is rank carelessness somewhere, and the man to blame can expect no mercy from me."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Reasoner. "I was the master-at-arms on watch. I am sure that I locked Engle in safely."

"And he was gone when the sentries were changed at eight. He got away soon after you were supposed to have locked him in, some time between supper and eight bells. I have no accusation to make as yet, Reasoner; you have been a splendid petty officer, and no doubt can explain everything satisfactorily, but Engle could not get away unless some one was careless, and he disappeared on your watch."

The prisoner's disappearance made a stir on the ship. The mystery of it appealed to the men, and the fact that Dictionary Dick was apt to get into trouble over it interested all his friends.

"Didn't you tell me that you lost the key to the brig the other day?" asked Slim Higgins.

"I found it in my other trousers," said Reasoner.

"Well, what's your guess?" asked Slim. "The talk that's driftin' forward from the ward-room is that the first luff is goin' to disrate you."

Reasoner looked at his friend steadily for a moment.

"Slim," he said, "I know that I turned the key on that door and then shook it just as I have been doing for a good many years. I don't know how Engle got away, but I've dug out a good word from the book, and I intend to sit quiet a little before I do anything."

"What's the word. If I was in your fix I'd be pouncin' on every theory I could think of like a gull on a table scrap."

"Appendix, which means something added."

"I get you," said Slim, who had a personal knowledge of the word, "something more to come out."

Hobo Smith came to Reasoner that evening. Arab trotted happily at his heels, and greeted Reasoner as a friend and comrade of his master. Smith lacked the dog's freedom of manner. He came with hesitation, more timid than he had been for weeks. He had something on his mind which his new outlook on life would not permit him to sit quiet under, and so in his own way he came to make amends.

"They are talking about disrating you because Engle got away," he said.

"Yes," said Reasoner, stroking the dog's head.

"You've been a good friend to Arab and me," said Smith, the words coming faster as he went along. "Engle wouldn't have been in trouble if you hadn't saved Arab. He wouldn't have been in the brig, nor had the scrap with the fireman."

"What are you driving at?" interrupted Reasoner.

"It's our fault that trouble has come to you," said Smith. "I wonder if the captain would let me have Arab in the brig if I said I let Engle out? That would clear you, and I wouldn't mind it so much with Arab."

"No," said Reasoner, "you couldn't keep the dog in the brig, but what made you offer to do this thing for me?"

Smith went on:

"I wouldn't have Arab if it wasn't for you. I don't amount to much, anyway. I thought maybe you would let me do this to pay back a little."

He was telling the things he longed to do, yet did not have the courage to carry out, for he knew that Dictionary Dick would not let him make the sacrifice.

Reasoner was touched.

"Get out of here," he said. "I thank you and Arab, but it can't be done. The real explanation will show up."

But Smith was unhappy. A conscience which he had forgotten he owned nagged him. The next day he went ashore and did not return with the liberty party.

"Now Smith's gone," said the first lieutenant. "I tell you, Reasoner, you are too easy on these fellows. It takes more than being good to them to make sailormen. I want to confer with the captain before I act, but unless you can furnish some good explanation for Engle's walking out of the brig, we'll probably disrate you."

HOBO SMITH had gone ashore without a plan. Always a child of chance, he thought that Engle might providentially show up. Just what he would do even then was not quite clear in his mind. He was undergoing the greatest trial of his life. Taught to live for himself alone, and to consider nothing worth while that concerned others, his experience on board the *Dixie* had almost made him over, but he was still in the transitory stage, and had not emerged fully into his new life. His big purpose in coming ashore was to fight out this battle with himself.

As he walked along, Arab trotting soberly at his heels, as if he understood the struggle his master was having, Smith finally made a decision. Reasoner had been too good to him. He would go back and square things up and take the punishment. At least Arab had been saved from Engle, and he knew that Reasoner would take good care of the dog until he was free again.

The resolution made Smith start briskly for the landing. He had just time to make the boat and return on time. Arab sensing the change in his master's spirits, ran ahead of him gayly. Suddenly he stopped, the bristles on his spine rose, and his jaws turned back from his rows of well-formed teeth. He faced across the sidewalk, and there walking calmly down the other side in civilian clothes was Engle. Smith would have passed him without recognition, but the dog had picked out the hate smell and knew his enemy in any garb.

"Keep back," Smith warned the dog, and then they turned to follow Engle.

The big coal-passer saw them and turned into a narrow alley before they had followed a block. Smith now had a plan. He would follow Engle until he could find a policeman and then have him arrested. He fully expected the man to run from him. Back in the old days when he dodged and evaded, that would have been his own course.

But Engle, seeing no help in sight, turned back to meet him, and Smith had a moment of panic, tempted to take to his heels. His dog saved him. Arab was the wrong breed to run from danger. He advanced, giving signs of a battle, and Smith followed.

"What do you want?" asked Engle. "Call that dog off, and beat it about your business or I'll kick both your ribs in."

"You're going back to the ship with us," said Smith, trying to put a little of the brave menace of Arab's growls into his voice.

"Well of all the nerve!" laughed Engle. "Scat, the two of you, before my mind changes!"

But Arab had charged. Engle's tone and the wave of his hand had been challenge enough. Straight for the throat he leaped, a tawny streak of fury. Engle struck out with both hands, dodging sideways, and the dog missed. One of the coal-passer's big fists struck him in the side as he passed in the air, and hurled him to the pavement. The shock almost knocked the breath out of him, and for a few moments he lay partly stunned. Engle ran toward him to finish what he had started, with a kick from one of his heavy shoes, but another and weightier antagonist had taken a hand.

Hobo Smith had jumped to the rescue of his dog, and was on Engle's back raining blows on his head. Engle forgot the dog for the time, and lunging backward tried to break the smaller man's hold by striking his body against the wall. Smith grunted, but held on, remembering that when his dog had hit the pavement he had not even whimpered.

"I'll get you," panted Engle. "I'll kill the two of you."

But with the threat there came to Hobo Smith that perfect thing which Reasoner had first given him a glimpse of, and in which Arab had further instructed him, and which all day and during the weeks past he had been striving for. He was made over. Something warm and new flooded his soul, driving out all cowardice, timidity, fear. He was a man. A resolute purpose guided his blows. He began to think in the cool terms of a grim determination.

One of Engle's straining hands let go in its backward search for Smith's throat. Arab was up and charging again. This time the dog came on a little more warily. As Engle kicked, he circled and dodged, watching for a chance. His adversary was handicapped with Smith on his back. Then as savagely as a springing wolf, he had found an opening, leaped and drawn blood, and was away before Engle could avenge.

Smith had squirmed away from the other's grip, when Arab made his attack, and before Engle could recover had struck him two blows in the face. Engle staggered. The ripping jaws of the dog had torn a gash down his right arm, and one of Smith's unscientific blows had reached the point of his jaw. Half-blinded, he could not dodge when the dog drove in again, and this time felt the hungry jaws at his throat.

"Take him off!" Engle bellowed, as he stumbled backward to the pavement under the weight of a third blow from Smith, and the impact of the dog.

"Lie still then," ordered Smith, and pried Arab away.

Engle's collar and tie had saved his throat from serious damage. A policeman came running down the alley. At its upper end a crowd had collected to see what was going on.

"An escaped prisoner in civilian clothes," explained Smith. "I tried to arrest him, and he resisted."

He spoke with confidence, sure of himself. Arab stood between his knees, watching the fallen Engle, ready to do battle on an instant, if his master's knees relaxed their light pressure.

"All right," said the officer. "I'll go on out to the ship with you to make sure."

"Thanks," said Hobo Smith, and turned to Engle. "Get up," he commanded, and the bigger man obeyed.

Hobo Smith and Arab with the handcuffed Engle and the policeman missed only one boat. When they reported on board the officer of the deck called the first lieutenant. Smith stood aside, with his dog resting on the deck by him, while the policeman told the story of Engle's capture, and the coal-passer was sent forward under a marine guard to have his wounds dressed before going into the brig. Then the policeman was dismissed, and the first lieutenant turned to Smith.

"Well, Smith," he said, "you've made good after all. You and that stray pup of yours. What can I do for you?"

Smith hesitated. Making a decision was one thing, living up to it another.

"Step over here where we'll be alone," suggested the officer, making a wrong guess at his reluctance.

"I want to give myself up," said Smith quickly. "I let Engle out. I stole Reasoner's key and made a duplicate. Engle slipped out of the brig when the marine was on the other end of the beat. I had Arab down there and the marine stopped a moment to pat him."

"What for?" demanded the amazed first lieutenant. "What did you do that for? Didn't Engle try to make fish-bait out of your dog?"

And then Smith told the whole miserable story of Engle's threat, his love for the dog, and his fear that Engle would harm Arab. Then of Reasoner's trouble over the escaped prisoner, his decision while ashore to tell the truth to save his friend, and finally a request that Reasoner have the dog while he was being punished.

The first lieutenant was a man of wide experience in the handling of men, but this problem puzzled him. While he thought, he asked questions. Smith must be punished, of course, but how, so that the man's new-found spirit would be strengthened and not broken?

"So you are doing this to save Reasoner, who has been good to you? The captain and I had decided to disrate him."

"Yes sir," answered Smith.

"What about Engle? This fireman that he struck is much better. I may have to restore him to duty if he behaves himself, after he has had a chance to think it over for a few months."

"Arab and me can handle him," said Smith, with a glance at the dog, which thumped his tail against the deck when his name was called.

"Then," said the first lieutenant, "because you wished to get Reasoner out of trouble and because you are no longer afraid of Engle, you are making this confession. Is there another reason?"

"Yes sir," said Smith. "I want to start all over clean, and I couldn't bear to have this thing haunting me. Besides," he finished, awkwardly, "Arab's a gentleman, and he's got sense. He might find it out on me."

The first lieutenant made up his mind.

"Go forward," he said, "and tell Reasoner to put you and Arab in the brig for three days' solitary confinement. You are to have bread and water, and the dog a full ration."

"Thank you, sir," said Smith and, "Salute," he ordered Arab.

The dog promptly sat up and raised a forepaw to his nose. Then the two went forward briskly. This was the lightest punishment that could be given.

"DOGMA," explained Reasoner to Slim Higgins later, "is an established principal or doctrine. In any man's case, the doctrine is to keep on looking until you find a path to the good in him."

"I like 'dogged' just as well," said Slim who was looking over Dictionary Dick's shoulder. "It's a couple of lines above and means 'stubborn.' "

But Reasoner had shut the book quickly. Sometimes Slim's levity got on his nerves.

The Better Mixer

by Russell A. Boggs

DeAlton Valentine

Author of "Rule 'G'," "A Regular Rounder," etc.

BURFORD, superintendent of the Western Division on the D. & P. Railroad, had before him a disturbing letter. It was not an unexpected letter; Burford knew that sooner or later it was bound to come, because there were not many things that escaped General Manager Yorke's eyes. Nevertheless, it was disturbing.

"I note," the general manager had written, "that during the past three months we have moved but two trains of stock from Billups. During the corresponding three months of last year we moved from Billups a total of twenty-five trains, or an average of about two trains weekly. The falling off is most serious.

"My conclusion is that the stock must be leaving Billups via the C. & M. R. I suggest that you personally go into the matter and see what can be done to recover this lost business for our line."

Burford knew just what Yorke actually meant when he said "I suggest;" it was simply the general manager's polite way of saying "I command." And Yorke, Burford was aware, expected him to make good.

The superintendent leaned back in his chair in a quandary. The loss of the stock business out of Billups was a thing that had been disturbing him not a little. Within the last twelve months he had had no less than five different agents there with a view of reclaiming the cattle shipments that had become diverted to the C. & M. R. But all to no purpose. Michie, the agent there now, he knew would never accomplish anything; Michie was too mild. But where to find another man, Burford didn't know. Yet that, obviously, was what he must do.

Burford's mind ran over his list of agents. One after another he mentally rejected—some because not available, due to being tied up at important posts, others because of lack of ability or because of some peculiarity of temperament. He traveled down the line until he came to Star City station; he considered Joseph Reilly, agent there.

"Too young," decided the superintendent after a little cogitation.

He went on down the list.

And yet, after he had gone dejectedly over all his men and had about reached the conclusion that among them there was not the one whom he should have, his thoughts went back to the too-young agent at Star City.

"Deuce take it, he's the best available man of the lot!" growled Burford finally, sitting up. "The thing is this: I've got to get somebody at Billups in Michie's place. Reilly looks to me like the best bet. What's the answer? The answer is, send Reilly!"

He looked at his watch, then reached for his hat.

II

YOUR ordinary agent seldom is greatly pleased to see his superintendent coming. It usually means trouble for somebody—and of course this somebody invariably is the agent. But in Joseph Reilly's young life a superintendent more or less was neither here nor there.

Young Joe greeted Superintendent Burford easily and with no undue fluttering within his breast when that official descended from the early afternoon train at Star City.

"How are things?" asked Burford.

"Everything is tip-top," answered Joe; "business booming and all that. I oughtn't to kick." He smiled a bit. "But that's the trouble. When everything is going good I get restless."

"Come in the office," said Burford. "Perhaps I can help you some."

They entered the station and within the office the superintendent took the agent's chair. Joe found himself another chair and placed it near Burford.

"Would you like to move?" began the superintendent abruptly as soon as they were seated.

"Moving is one of the best things I do," said Joe. He nodded. "Yes, sure. When and where?"

If the superintendent expected a little more obsequiousness, he never betrayed the fact. Rather, he seemed to find something to relish in the easy assurance of his agent. Burford's eyes took on a faint sparkle.

"Tomorrow," he answered. "And to Billups."

"I'll pack my tooth-brush and other shirt tonight," smiled Joe. "I've never been to Billups, but I hear it's a real live town."

"It's live enough," assured Burford. "And we need a real live man there. Do you think you might qualify?"

Joe smiled more widely.

"I'm much too modest——"

"Hang your modesty!" laughed Burford. "You're no dead one—and I know that!"

"All right, have it your own way; I'm the live man for the live town. And then what?"

"And then as follows." The superintendent's face became more serious. "In the first place," he began, "we've lost a lot of business out of Billups. A year ago we were handling two stock trains a week out of there, bound for South Omaha. But just now we're lucky if we get one in a month. The C. & M. R. also goes through Billups, you know—and they've taken practically all the cattle business away from us. It's to get back to our old footing that we're aiming at.

"Our trouble started over a claim that a stockman named Mohr had entered against us. Our claim department refused to settle for the amount he declared he should have. He got sore, spread his grievance among his fellow-cattlemen, gave us a bad name, and they all flocked over to the C. & M. R. And there they've stuck.

"Our service is better than the C. & M. R's.—always has been. And it has been pretty well established, since, that Mohr, the man who put in the trouble-making claim, was trying to hold us up. But neither our better service nor the establishing of Mohr's unjust demands has seemed to help us. The shippers continue to stick with our competitor, the C. & M. R."

"Why?" asked Joe.

He had been paying strict attention to Burford's words.

"That's the whole thing," said Burford, "the answer to that why. It's this: the C. & M. R. has an agent up there named McPike. Mr. McPike is the villain. He holds 'em—the shippers, I mean."

"How?" asked Joe.

"By personality, as near as I can find out," replied Burford. "He's one great little old mixer, Mr. McPike; and you know how the average cattleman likes a good mixer. He surely does hold the boys down to his knitting."

"I foresee," said Joe enthusiastically, "that an interesting time will be had by one and all. I'm just dying to meet friend McPike. He appeals to me."

"He's no fool, as you can guess," said Burford. "You'll find you've got a sure enough job on your hands, trying to get some of those boys to come back to the D. & P. I'll confess I don't know how you'll do it. I'll not give you any instructions. You just go about it in your own way."

"Thanks," said Joe. "If there's one thing I've a fondness for it's orders like 'Go about it in your own way.'"

"Another thing," said Burford. "In being a good mixer this man McPike often badly bends the rules. What I mean is, he may sometimes take a drink, or indulge in cards or be away from his depot without permission. The C. & M. R. I know is aware of this: but they only wink at it." Burford glanced shrewdly at Reilly. "We may have to do a little winking ourselves."

Joe Reilly never batted an eye-lid. He returned Burford's gaze steadily.

"Exactly," was all he said.

"Understand," said the superintendent quickly, "I'm trusting to your discretion."

"I'm no saint," assured Joe, "but I know where to stop."

He was chuckling, inwardly, in appreciation of Burford's predicament. The superintendent did not want to seem to encourage him to break any of the rules, and yet, if it became necessary, neither did he want Joe to be too prudish.

"You can trust me in that," added Joe. "I believe I understand just what you have in mind."

"I'm glad of that," said Burford with relief. "If there were to be any actual wrong, I wouldn't want you to do it. I'm a little reluctant, anyhow. But we've been sending agent after agent up there to Billups and not one has been able to do any good. So I'm getting desperate. If we can once get our old business back I know we can hold it. Your job will be to get it started back. We'll do the rest."

He paused and looked earnestly at Reilly.

"I'm counting on you to be the better mixer," he said. "Is it a go?"

"It's a go!" said Joseph.

III

BILLUPS lies in the narrow, south end of a mighty V-shaped valley. To the north and northwest stretch the broadening ranges whence come the cattlemen with their droves, seeking the outlet to the markets. This outlet is Billups, with its two rival railroads—the D. & P. and the C. & M. R. The D. & P. skirts the eastern end of the town, the C. & M. R. the western edge.

Ex-agent Michie and young Joseph Reilly—the latter newly installed agent for the D. &. P.—stepped out on to the station platform on a Friday, just before noon. Michie was leaving; his train awaited down at the water-tank while the engine's tank was filling. The ex-agent spoke guardedly in Joseph's ear.

"Watch that contwisted clerk of yours," warned Michie. "It's my opinion that he's a bad one."

"Why so?" asked Joseph.

"I believe he tells things to McPike. In fact, I'm pretty near sure of it; I've seen him talking to McPike when he thought I wasn't near."

"Anything else will be appreciated," urged Joe.

"It's this way. Every time I would get one of these stubborn cowmen around here persuaded to try our line, it seems McPike would find it out, flag the cowman and get him to cancel the order for cars and then ship over the C. & M. R. I believe the clerk kept his eye on all my car orders and would tip McPike off as to what was going on. Doubtless McPike handed him something for the information."

"*Hmmh!* Sounds interesting," said Reilly.

The train pulled away from the water-plug and came up to the platform. Michie started towards his coach.

"Good-by!" said Joe. "I'll keep in mind what you've told me."

"Good luck!" called Michie and climbed aboard.

Consequently, that afternoon Reilly had a conference with his office force, one Jack Dowdall; the office force was operator, clerk and all-'round handy man.

"You've been here with the D. & P. how long, Jacky?" asked Joe.

"Oh, about a year," stated the clerk.

"Know all the folks about town?"

"Most of 'em. I been in this burg close to two years."

"What did you do before starting to work with the D. & P.?"

"Worked around. Was with the C. & M. R. for a while."

"Working for McPike?"

"Yes."

"Why did you quit?"

"Not enough money."

The youthful Dowdall yawned, rolled a cigaret and lit it. Reilly, unobserved, eyed the clerk sharply. From the first the new agent had not been greatly impressed with his office force. Dowdall was a fair telegrapher—and that about let him out. Now, the revelation of the force's former connection with McPike on the C. & M. R. gave rise to a sudden suspicion—particularly in the light of what Michie had hinted at. Joe decided to investigate further.

"What's been the matter with these other agents who've been up here lately?" inquired Joe casually. "Why couldn't they haul in some business for the D. & P.?"

Dowdall smiled patronizingly.

"Poor fish, all of 'em."

"How do you mean, poor fish?"

"No brains, no nerve." The clerk gave a little laugh, as if the thoughts of the deficiencies of the numerous ex-agents in some way was not unpleasant. "This McPike is a regular hum-dinger. He'd just tell them boys to head in; and wherever he said, that's where they headed in!"

"Had 'em buffaloed, eh?"

The clerk laughed aloud.

"Say, he guessed every move them poor fish planned to make and he headed 'em off, every time!"

"Well, what do you think about me? Any use to try and buck him?"

Jacky smiled again. It was a gentle smile, but the gentleness of it was almost lost in the patronizing superiority of it; something pitying was in it, too.

"I'll tell you," condescended the clerk. "No; not a bit of use. You haven't got a chance."

"You're wrong, Jacky!" Joe's voice abruptly became sharp and short. "Wrong, I say. Get your hat and coat!"

"What?" asked Dowdall, apparently mildly surprised.

"Get your hat and coat!" ordered Joe. "Two articles, there on a nail behind the door."

The clerk did as ordered. The curtness of the new agent's words appeared to sink into his brain; he looked uneasy as Reilly opened the office door.

"Get out!" said Joe shortly. "You're through!"

"I'm through!" cried the clerk. "What do you mean?"

"Exactly what I said. I'll not need you any longer."

"Why — why!" stuttered Dowdall. "What's the matter? What have I done?"

"Enough," answered Joe calmly. "Go and tell McPike you want your old job back."

Some understanding of what was in Reilly's mind evidently came to the clerk at that.

"You got me wrong," he said sullenly. "I'm not siding in with him."

"Maybe, Jacky—maybe," said Joe. "But I'm figuring the other way." He smiled amiably at the crestfallen Dowdall. "Sorry, old boy. But when you're working for a man you want to work for him—and not for some one else."

A flush came into Dowdall's face, disclosing that the shot had touched. Also, a little gleam of new-found respect for Reilly's keenness came into his eyes, a little gleam which he tried to hide.

"Aw, forget it!" he growled, and flung out of the depot.

From his office window Joe watched Dowdall stride away. Perhaps he'd been hasty; but he thought not. He sat down and sent a message to Burford:

SUPT. BURFORD:
My clerk has left. Please send another.
J. REILLY.

By the time he had gotten the message off, some fifteen minutes had passed since the time of Dowdall's departure. Joe considered what to do next. He had no definite plan of campaign mapped out and for a few moments he sat in a silent study trying to think of some place to start or some method to follow. It must be a vigorous method, he decided. And then a whimsical idea came to him.

"I believe I'll go over and see McPike!" he suddenly exclaimed.

The more he thought of it the better the whimsy pleased him. He had no trains coming for at least an hour or so; therefore he could lock up the depot for a little time.

"By Jing, yes!" he ejaculated, springing to his feet. "There's nothing like getting acquainted with a man, especially if you're looking for a chance to kick him on the shins!"

IV

BEING what is known as a weak vessel, Jack Dowdall's actions were often governed by, and his mind was susceptible to, the suggestion of some stronger will. Hence it perhaps was not strange that after leaving the D. & P. depot he decided to go and see McPike—as Reilly had suggested.

Dowdall proceeded quickly across town to the station of the C. & M. R. Agent McPike sat alone in his office when Dowdall arrived.

"Hello, Jack!" greeted McPike. Then, perceiving the sullen expression on Dowdall's face. "What's bothering you?"

"Plenty!" replied Jack. He glared into the shrewd face of the C. & M. R. agent. "The D. & P. has got another new agent; and the first thing the blasted fool did was to tie the can on me!"

Agent McPike settled comfortably back in his chair, the chair groaning in protest as he did so. The C. & M. R. agent was a big man, tall and thick. There were fine wrinkles around his eyes, as there are apt to be around the eyes of men who laugh much. Most folks noticed this; but some folks noticed more the thin, almost cruel lips of the man, set close together, hard and straight.

"So they've got another one," observed McPike. That seemed to be the news that interested him most. "Who is he; and what kind of a guy?"

"Take it from me," returned Dowdall, "he's a real wide-awake guy!" He fixed his gaze determinedly on McPike. "But that's not why I came—just to tell you about him. I want to know what you'll do to get me on the C. & M. R. again."

The wrinkles around McPike's eyes did not contract, but his mouth opened about an eighth of an inch in a thin-lipped grin.

"I can't take you on here, Jack," he replied complacently. "I've got a helper; and one's my limit."

"Well, how about some other station along the line?"

McPike shook his head.

"No—no place I know of. I understand everybody is full up. What's this new guy's name?"

"Come on, you can't put me off that way!" cried Dowdall peevishly. "You could get me on if you wanted. Look what all I did for you!"

"Keep your shirt on!" returned McPike easily. "I guess you didn't lose anything on me." He regarded Dowdall with cold, arrogant eyes. "You might have been of some use to me over on the D. & P.; but now you're not."

"Then you won't help me any?" demanded Dowdall.

"Too bad, but I can't do a thing," said McPike suavely, once more exhibiting his narrow smile.

At that moment a patron came to the open office window.

"Come out and look at this case of coffee, Mac!" he called in to the agent. "It's all smashed to the devil!"

"All right," answered McPike, "I'll be right along." He rose and went out toward the freight-house, leaving the fuming Dowdall alone in the office.

The telegraph instruments, lined up along the desk at the front of the office, clicked persistently in Dowdall's ears as he wrathfully reflected over McPike's treatment. He had expected something better of the C. & M. R. agent—at least a little assistance in securing another job. But this calm rebuff, this calm ignoring of all claims, brought home to the ex-clerk the fact that, being no longer in a position to furnish information as to the activities of the D. & P. agent, McPike cared nothing as to where he drifted. The ex-clerk was filled with vindictive thoughts—as usually is the case of the person who finds himself in a similar plight.

The telegraph instruments kept clattering away in Dowdall's ears. Being a telegrapher himself and having at one time worked in this office, he was familiar with all the calls, and had, as well, a knowledge of the business routine. He heard the division office calling some other office down the line.

Desire for vengeance crept into Dowdall's head. If he only could get back at McPike! McPike really was responsible for his having lost the job on the D. & P., the ex-clerk told himself.

A plan suddenly jumped into Dowdall's brain. He sat up straight, then got to his feet and walked over quickly to the window that faced the freight-house and peered out. McPike was not in sight.

The bold, bad scheme formed swiftly in Dowdall's head. Tomorrow, Saturday, he knew was the day when the big cattle shipments were made from Billups, the stock-cars always being forwarded from the division terminal yards Friday night in time to arrive at Billups early Saturday morning.

Dowdall glanced again out the window. Still no McPike. Doubtless the agent would be absent a few minutes more, going over the damaged case of coffee, and checking up the loss. The division office was still calling; there would be time.

The ex-clerk opened the key on the division office wire, a mischief-making message already formed in his brain.

* * *

THE C. & M. R. station seemed deserted when Joe Reilly arrived there. He entered through the rear door of the waiting-room and looked through the open ticket window. He beheld but one man within the office and he smiled a little as he perceived that it was his late clerk, Dowdall. The late clerk's back was toward the ticket window. Apparently he had not heard Reilly's entrance, for he did not turn his head or make any other sign to disclose that he was conscious of the D. & P. agent's proximity.

Reilly saw Dowdall peer quickly out the front office window. There was something strangely furtive about the quick glance, something sly in the very poise of the ex-clerk's head. Joe watched him silently, noting the vindictive lines of Dowdall's half-averted face, also the working of his uneasy fingers. And then, when the ex-clerk all at once opened the telegraph key, with sudden resolution showing in his crafty countenance, Joe strained his ears to hear what the sounder spelled as Dowdall started a message.

The message came to an end and the operator at the other end gave his OK. Dowdall straightened up, his face a little flushed, his eyes glittering triumphantly.

"There, —— your hide, McPike!" he ejaculated guardedly—but not guardedly enough to prevent the words from reaching Joe Reilly's ears. "I guess maybe that'll fix your clock—for a little bit, anyway!"

Joe Reilly instantly and noiselessly slipped out of the station. He did not comprehend all that had taken place in the C. & M. R. office, but he did comprehend enough to give him a pretty shrewd idea of it. He decided, swiftly, that the beginning of his personal acquaintance with McPike could wait.

"McPike has turned Jacky down," reflected Joe, his brain working at high speed, "and Jacky thinks he sees a good chance to play the devil!" Joe suppressed a grin as a subtle plan suddenly began to unfold before him. "All's fair in love and business!" he commented silently. "So why not?"

Apparently there was no answer to the why not, for he immediately legged it back to the D. & P. station. He entered his office and from there sent another message. The message was as follows:

> Supt. Burford:
>
> Send me sixty or seventy stock-cars. Get them here quick—before tomorrow noon if at all possible.
>
> J. Reilly.

After the message had gone Reilly busied himself around the office. At 5:30 the southbound limited arrived. And just as it started to pull out Joe was not greatly surprised to behold his erstwhile clerk come streaking across the station platform and pile on to one of the coaches, suitcase in hand.

"Jacky, it seems, is leaving for parts unknown," said Joe. "He's wise in that."

And to show that he harbored no hard feelings he waved his hand at the departing Jacky.

V

AT A square table in a corner of the Oasis saloon the agent of the C. & M. R. sat opposite a drooping-mustached individual. The hour was around nine in the evening. The Oasis was well filled with patrons, the patrons being for the greater part cattle-owners, arrived early for the morrow's loading. The cattle-owner's herds would follow; meantime they, the cattlemen, set themselves to a little recreation.

"I tell you, Mac," said the drooping-mustached man, "the boys are getting a little bit restless. This last stunt of your old railroad, handling the stock so slow that they exceeded the thirty-six-hour limit and had to have one more feed than usual, made them pretty sore."

"Oh, they'll get over that, Mohr," said McPike with easy confidence. "We can hold 'em."

"Don't you be too sure," said Mohr firmly. "I heard them grumbling a lot over that extra feed bill. They're like everybody else—they don't like to be kicked in the pocketbook by a railroad. I heard 'em saying the C. & M. R. wasn't the only road they could ship on."

McPike looked a little worried at that.

"It was a boner the C. & M. R. pulled, I'll admit. And don't think that I forgot to tell the boss up at division headquarters about it! He promised the next bunch'd be handled quicker. Said he'd just raise Cain along the line and wake the other fellows up."

"He'd better!" declared Mohr.

McPike leaned a trifle closer to the table.

"The D. & P. has sent another new agent here," he said to Mohr. He grinned meaningly. "I'm figuring on his helping to put the boys back in a good humor again."

"You don't say!" said Mohr.

"Yes, sir. Fellow named Reilly. Just got in today."

"Well! Go on, tell me the rest."

"I dropped a word in Pegram's ear this evening. He's going to strike up with Reilly and steer him in here."

Mohr looked pleased.

"Well, if you can pull off your usual stunt before the crowd maybe the boys'll lose all their sore thoughts. Pull it off good, though. What kind of a hombre is this Reilly?"

"Young chap." McPike smiled confidently. "You just leave it to me!"

The doors at the front of the saloon swung open and two men entered: Joseph Reilly and a shining-faced, heavy-set man. It was a rather boisterous entrance that the two made. Rather, it was a somewhat boisterous entrance that the shining-faced man made; his voice could be heard enthusiastically urging Reilly to come in and meet the boys—all good friends of his.

Inside the doorway Joe Reilly stopped. The eyes of nearly all the patrons had turned toward the doorway, attracted by the commotion there. Joe laid his hand firmly on his conductor's shoulder and cast a calm glance around the room.

"Does this man belong to any of you gentlemen?" he asked.

There was silence for a few seconds among the assembled cattlemen. Then here and there a little chuckle broke out.

"I don't know's he belongs to any one in particular," offered a grizzled old cowman, standing nearby. He eyed Joe with approval. "But if he does belong to any one, I reckon it'd be McPike."

"McPike?" repeated Joe. "Where is he?"

The old cowman pointed a finger to the table in the corner where the C. & M. R. agent and Mohr were watching.

"There he is; the large gent seated to the left."

Reilly caught his late conductor by the arm and speedily led him over to the table.

"McPike," said Joe abruptly, "here I am! This toady of yours tried to draw me in here. Mr. Toady, report to your boss "

A sudden silence had fallen in the saloon. Men turned more attentively to the table in the corner. Those who held glasses aloft set them softly down on the bar. Joe Reilly was a stranger to all of them. But they sensed that something interesting was coming off.

The toady stood without words, looking from Reilly to McPike. He moistened his lips once or twice, but no sound came from them.

"You can't?" said Joe shortly. "Very well, I'll speak myself." He looked at the C. & M. R. agent. "Your friend didn't fool me even a little bit, McPike; he's too clumsy. It didn't take me a whole lot more than a minute to guess that for some reason other than mere friendliness he wanted to get me in this place; and I guessed, too, that the reason was you. All right, here I am. What do you want?"

McPike raised his big bulk to his feet. He couldn't keep the astonishment out of his eyes. Things were not going exactly as he had planned. He suddenly realized that he was going to have a hard time making a fool of this man in front of the cattlemen. The D. & P.'s new agent was too aggressive; he carried things, so to speak, right into the enemy's country. But McPike resolved to make an effort.

"You've got a great imagination, my boy!" he boomed, trying to throw a good-natured note in with his patronizing air. He wrinkled his eyes to show his merriment. "And what would I be wanting with you?"

He drew himself to his full height. But if his thought was intimidation, his thought availed him nothing.

Joe Reilly looked at him with level eyes.

"I just believe I'll tell you," he said. "I believe that'd be a right good plan."

He bent forward slightly and fixed his eyes on the C. & M. R. agent.

"You wanted this, McPike!" said Joe, his words coming with calm assurance. "You wanted to get me in here and then, after revealing to these men who I am, make me act the clown while you snapped the whip. I've heard of your methods with other agents the D. & P. has sent here."

Joe looked around for a brief instant to the interested stockmen.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I'll introduce myself. My name is Reilly—Joseph Reilly; and I'm the new agent for the D. & P. at Billups."

Once more there was a stillness in the Oasis while the cattlemen quietly regarded Reilly. And then, as before, it was the grizzled cowman who spoke.

"We're pleased to meet you!" said the old man; his eyes twinkled and there was a subdued gurgling in his throat. "My name's Mantooth—'Old Sam' Mantooth."

Joe Reilly turned a swift grin on him, then swung back to the C. & M. R. agent.

"McPike," he said evenly, "you can't do it. You can't make me do anything. I'm telling you, big fellow. If you think otherwise, go to it!"

The wrinkles had disappeared from around McPike's eyes. The hard lines around his thin-lipped mouth stood out; a dull, angry red had come into his face; his eyes flamed with rage.

"You young fool!" he roared. "You will try to bluff me!"

He took a quick step around the end of the table and made a lunge at Joe.

Starting from the hip, Joe drove his fist upward. There was a sudden solid smack, and McPike returned toward the same spot that he had just left. But, returning, he did not travel on his feet; the only thing he did travel on was air. And when he arrived it was on his back, whereon he laid for a moment, half-dazed.

"Bless my soul!" came from Old Sam Mantooth. "The immortal Bob F. was right! The bigger they are the harder they fall!" He raised his voice. "Mr. Reilly, I'd be much pleased if you'd teach me that."

Joe smiled broadly at him.

"Call around at my office any day!" he invited.

He looked down at the blinking McPike.

"You're in a draft there, Maccy," he said pleasantly. "Get up or you'll catch cold. Then I'll tell you something else."

His face betraying his embarrassment, McPike scrambled to his feet and looked at Joe sourly.

"Before I say the something else," proceeded Joe, "I'll give you a chance. Have you any observations to make, further?"

McPike swallowed hard. Murder glared in his eyes—hate at being made to appear so helpless before the cattlemen. The tables had been reversed, exactly, from what he had planned. But swallow was all McPike did; he ventured no word.

"Well, never mind," soothed Joe. "But what I was going to say was this: I'd like to lay a little wager with you that between this and Sunday I'll have at least seventy-five per cent. of the cattle moving out of Billups traveling over the D. & P. What say?"

At that McPike seemed to find his tongue. Some of the arrogance came back into his face.

"If you do," he cried, "may I be damned! There's no smart Aleck going to come in here and show off and then do anything like that!"

"Nevertheless," returned Joe evenly, "I'm offering to lay the bet. They tell me you're quite a sporting man. Will you accept a wager on that? And if so, what will you stake on it?"

"Accept it!" he shouted. "Well I guess yes! And I'll tell you what I'll stake—I'll stake my job against yours! If you lose, you quit! If I lose, I quit!"

He glared with sudden triumph at Reilly. The D. & P. agent had played right into his hand. This was a good way to get rid of a man who in time might prove a dangerous competitor for the cattlemen's patronage.

But the one day that came before Sunday was, comparatively, a short time. McPike was confident he could hold the stockmen to the C. & M. R. for that long despite his recent sorry showing. And if the D. & P. agent backed down now Reilly would be forever branded as no good sport, as displaying a yellow streak. McPike felt that he had Reilly, coming and going.

Joe Reilly merely swung 'round to the absorbed cattlemen.

"You've heard the conditions," he said to them. "The bet's on!"

VI

BILLUPS buzzed on Saturday morning with talk of Friday night's affair in the Oasis. Naturally, the cattlemen had not been backward in giving out the details. Billups received the news with relish and then took to discussing the matter at great length. And the final, practically unanimous verdict was that, while they admired Reilly's nerve and acclaimed his skill, they nevertheless were convinced that he had overdone himself in the matter of the wager.

After making such a showy beginning, why should any man go and lay himself open to such an anti-climax, asked Billups. McPike, it was decided, had shown great astuteness in drawing the terms of the bet; it was felt that in this he had regained much of the prestige he had temporarily lost in the first part of the Oasis episode. That McPike could hold the shippers to the C. & M. R. for this one day, Billups had not the least doubt.

It was nearly eight o'clock when McPike reached his station on Saturday morning. And when he did arrive there he was surprised to find no stock-cars on the cattle-chute sidings. McPike stared, batted his eyes, then hurried into the office. He pulled the plugs from the switchboard, sat down at his message wire key and swiftly began to call the division office.

In a moment or two the division office answered and McPike dashed off a message to his superintendent.

SUPT. HIBBARD:
No stock-cars on hand to take care of today's loading. Advise quick when they will arrive.
P. H. MCPIKE.

Twenty minutes later McPike received an answer.

P. H. MCPIKE:
No cars scheduled for your station account all orders canceled by your wire of yesterday P. M. Why do you now ask for cars?
HIBBARD.

McPike regarded this message incredulously, holding the key open the while.

"What in the devil!" he snorted. "What's he trying to do—kid me?"

He made several meaningless dots and dashes on the wire. Then, composing himself enough to think straight, he fired another message to headquarters.

SUPT. HIBBARD:
Have postively no knowledge of any message cancelling car orders. Will need cars today as usual. Must have them as shippers already are arriving with stock.
P. H. MCPIKE.

The cattle were indeed arriving. From his office windows McPike could see the first bunch rounded up near one of the stock-chutes. While he awaited his answer another bunch arrived; and directly the owners of the two droves came up to the station and entered.

"Where's the cars, Mac?" asked the first arrival.

McPike turned a worried face around.

"They should have come in early this morning, Scherr," he answered. "I've wired about 'em and am just waiting for a reply. Stay 'round a minute till I see."

The sounder began to clatter his call just then and he answered. The operator at headquarters started his message.

P. H. MCPIKE:
Following message from your office was received by us at 3:08 P.M. yesterday: "Owing to unforeseen delays stockmen will not be able to ship tomorrow. Cancel all orders for stock-cars. Will later advise fully as to date needed. Signed—P. H. McPike." Acting on this message we canceled movement of all stock-cars for Billups and have sent all our surplus empties north. Impossible to forward any cars to you today and probably not tomorrow, Monday being earliest date we can promise. Would be glad to have an explanation of the inconsistency shown in your various wires.
HIBBARD.

McPike fairly bounced out of his chair as this message was completed. He let out a yell that brought the two cattlemen running to the window.

"What's the matter, Mac?" called Scherr.

"Matter!" shrieked McPike, waving the message. "Matter!"

He filled the air with burning words for a minute, then smacked the message down before them.

"Read that!"

The two read the words, carefully. They looked up in perplexity.

"What's it mean, Mac?" asked Scherr. "Why did you cancel the cars on us?"

"Cancel 'em!" roared McPike. "I didn't! Not in a thousand years. Somebody's playing me dirt!"

The two looked steadily at him. Sudden suspicion came into their eyes.

"It looks that way!" said the second man mildly.

Something in his tone caused the agent's face to flush angrily.

"You don't think it was me, do you?" he demanded. "Good God, Toomey, why would I? I want to keep your business, not drive it away!"

"Yes, that's so," put in Scherr. "You wouldn't be liable to do anything like that. But sometimes these danged railroads do funny things. Maybe your road thinks we can just lay around and keep our cattle here till they get ready to furnish the cars, on Monday."

"No, sir!" protested McPike. "The company's not made up of such fools. I tell you, somebody else has had a hand in this."

"Well, who?" asked Toomey. A half-humorous light came into his eyes. "Maybe that D. & P. agent who made the bet with you last night did it?"

McPike gaped at the cattlemen.

"By thunder!" he bellowed. "By thunder!" He smashed his fist on the window ledge. "You've said it!"

"But how could he?" cut in Scherr. "He wasn't here in your office, was he?"

McPike's face fell a little.

"No," he admitted, "he wasn't."

He wrinkled his brows in thought for a moment. Then all at once recollection of Jack Dowdall's presence in the office while he, McPike, was out in the freight-house checking up the damaged case of coffee came to the C. & M. R. agent. He looked up at the two stockmen.

"It wasn't Reilly himself!" he exclaimed. "But his clerk was in here—that double-faced Dowdall!"

He whirled away from the window, slammed open the office door and emerged into the waiting-room where Scherr and Toomey were.

"What now?" inquired Scherr.

"I'm going over and see that D. & P. man!" stormed McPike. "He can't put his clerk up to anything like that and then get away with it!"

"Remember," cautioned Toomey dryly, "that boy totes a pretty fair wallop around with him. Don't do anything rash."

"Rash, ——!" cried McPike. "I'm going over—and the wallop won't have anything to do with this case!"

He patted his belt significantly.

"Well, we might as well go too," said Scherr.

He and Toomey fell in step as McPike bolted out.

At the edge of the station platform they met a bunch of three more shippers, just arrived.

"Where's our cars, Mac?" demanded one of the new arrivals.

"Hush!" warned Toomey. "Mac's got something on his mind."

The three seemed puzzled.

"But where—" began the man who had spoken before.

"Oh, shucks!" said Toomey. "We're on our way to see about it. Come along."

He winked gravely.

So the three, perceiving the wink, fell in also. And as they hastened toward the D. & P. station Scherr and Toomey explained briefly to them.

VII

THE early morning D. & P. train north, on Saturday, was handled by the same crew that had been on the southbound limited the evening before. Just before the northbound pulled out this Saturday A.M. the brakeman came running to Joe Reilly with a letter.

"That clerk of yours who went south with us yesterday gave me this letter. He said to be sure and give it to you when I came back up this morning," said the brakeman.

"Thanks," said Joe, and held it unopened in his hand until the train had pulled away. Then he tore the sealed envelop open. Within was but one sheet of paper.

Joe read what was written thereon; and when he came to the end he whistled softly.

"Well, maybe this will come in handy!" he commented and stuffed the letter in his pocket.

Somewhere around 8:30 Old Sam Mantooth dropped in at the depot.

"I ain't doin' any shipping today," he explained to Joe. "Just come to town to look 'round." He eased himself against the window ledge. "How's business?"

"Not so good as it will be," smiled Joe.

Old Sam smiled also.

"Just between you and me," he said, "I believe McPike needs to be taken down a peg. But it gets me how you're figurin' on winning that bet."

"You wait and see," advised Joe, smiling more widely.

"I'll sure do that!" answered Sam. "I'll just sort of stick around and keep my eye open." He regarded Joe silently for a few seconds. "That McPike is no man to fool with, son. You laid him out real slick last night; but the next time you want to watch."

"I'll be watching," promised Joe.

A few minutes afterward Mantooth strolled out. But ten minutes later he hurried in again.

"McPike's comin' with a bunch!" he announced quickly. "He's comin' a'foggin'!"

Joe, who had been busy at the wire, now and then casting an expectant glance up the track to the north, arose from his chair at once, pulled on his coat, put on his hat and came out of the office.

"I'm much obliged," he said to Mantooth as he stepped toward the waiting-room door. "I'll just go out and meet him."

Sam followed.

"If you need any help—" he offered.

"Thanks, again. But I'm not expecting to."

Joe swung the door open and stepped out.

Just outside the depot Joe and Old Sam met McPike and his party. The C. & M. R. agent's eyes were snapping, his face twitching.

"So that's the way you do things, is it?" cried McPike, coming to a halt. "Put your clerk up to coming in my office with a cock-and-bull story and then while I'm out have him send a lying message to get me all balled up!" He thrust his head forward wrathfully. "You're a rotten sneak!"

Joe Reilly contemplated McPike composedly.

"You surprise me!" he said coolly. "Besides which, you lie!"

"Is that so?" shouted McPike. "I'll show you something!"

His hand jerked toward his hip.

There was a single flash and report. The pistol that McPike had drawn flew from his hand and fell to the platform.

"This is a cheap trick, I know," said Joe Reilly apologetically. "But it was about the only thing I could do."

McPike nursed the stinging fingers of his otherwise unhurt gun-hand. He stared at Reilly. The agent of the D. & P. was standing at ease, his hands nestling in the side pockets of his coat. So lightning-quick had been the drawing of his gun and the shot that Joe's movements had almost baffled the eye. But Old Sam Mantooth's eye had not been baffled.

"That was real nice," said Old Sam. "Excuse me, Mr. Reilly, for ever being so bold as to offer you advice."

Away to the north the piercing whistle of an approaching train sounded. Joe pricked up his ears at the sound; his eyes brightened.

"McPike," he said, "you've got the wrong idea, and I can prove it."

From his pocket he pulled the letter that the brakeman had handed him. He extracted and unfolded the sheet of paper.

"Here's a little letter I received just an hour or so ago. I'd like to have you hear it."

Aloud he read:

> Mr. Reilly:
>
> If McPike comes around blaming you for mixing up his stock-car orders you show him this letter. He'll likely be around blaming you, but of course you had nothing to do with it.
>
> While in his office this afternoon I sent a message to his superintendent to cancel all his orders for cars. Maybe the next time he'll know better than to turn down flat a man who's done as much as I've done for him.
>
> J. Dowdall.

Joe finished reading and passed the sheet of paper to McPike.

"I guess you know his writing," he said; "you can tell it's genuine."

McPike took the letter and examined it closely. It was plain that he was convinced.

"Dowdall beat it yesterday," continued Joe. "And when I received the letter I was at first a little surprised; because Dowdall has no cause to love me, considering that I gave him the bounce yesterday. But I've doped out since that he wrote it through pure vanity. You see, he wouldn't have enjoyed his revenge real good unless he was certain that you, McPike, would find out it was he who'd gummed things up for you. He wanted all the credit for himself—wanted to show you how he put it over you; and he figured that you'd be coming to see me and that I'd show you the letter. And I'll say this for him, that he figured it out pretty straight."

There was a minute's silence. McPike was doing some heavy thinking. Things were becoming clearer to him every second.

"It looks to me," spoke up Old Sam Mantooth, "as if Mr. McPike was trying to rope the wrong horse."

He glanced questioningly at the men who had come with the C. & M. R. agent.

"By Judas, yes!" cried Scherr. His eyes and the eyes of the others were turned on Joe with open respect. "I hope you'll not have any hard feelin's against any of us boys."

"Sure not!" answered Joe promptly.

An irrepressible, friendly grin came to his face.

"But I don't mind making a little confession," he said. "As Dowdall says, I had nothing to do with the message he sent; but I'll admit I did know that he sent it."

"You knew it?" flashed McPike. "When?"

"Yesterday afternoon." Joe turned his friendly grin directly on McPike. "You see, I thought I'd just go over and get acquainted with you; and when I stepped into your station, there was Dowdall, alone in your office, sending the message. I heard it."

"I'll be blasted!" cried McPike. Matters were becoming clearer still to him. "And then you went away without waiting to get acquainted!"

"Exactly!" returned the smiling Joe. "I felt that was best. It's been war between your road and mine, you know. So I decided it'd be a foolish stunt not to grab the break when it came my way."

The freight from the north by now had drawn near, its deep whistle once more roaring out as Joe finished speaking. They all looked up the track toward it. The engines—for it proved to be a double-header—swung around a long curve and came in sight; and after the engines came a long string of empty stock-cars. The engines drifted down to the stock-yard siding and stopped. A brakeman jumped down, threw the switch and gave a signal.

Joe turned to face the cattlemen.

"And in the meantime," he said, "if you boys are having any trouble getting your stock out, why, here're lots of cars. I'll be pleased to help, if you can use 'em."

The cattlemen had been regarding Joe in a rather puzzled sort of way. But at his words their faces cleared.

"You son of a gun!" exclaimed Scherr. "Use 'em? You bet your life! Catch us waiting 'round here till Monday for cars on the C. & M. R! What do you say, boys?"

"Bet your life!" cried the rest of the boys.

Scherr faced about and began to move off.

"Wait a second," called Joe. "I just want to say that as far as I'm concerned, of course that little bet McPike and I laid is off. Providing I won, I never had any very serious intentions of demanding its payment." His ever-ready smile again broke out. "Things wouldn't be half as interesting around here if he'd leave."

"You son of a gun!" said Scherr again.

It seemed to be the only expression he could find that suited. His lean cheeks wrinkled into a grin that matched Joe's.

"You're more than smooth—you're a dead game sport!"

He turned to the other stockmen.

"Come on!" he said. "Let's go and get our stuff headed over this way."

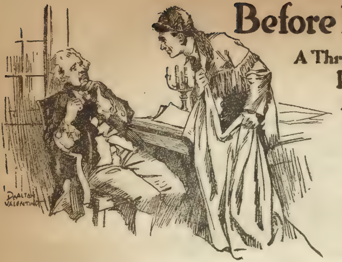
SATURDAY evening, just before he left his office for the day, Superintendent Burford received a message from Billups. It read:

SUPT. BURFORD:
Loaded and forwarded today sixty-six cars stock, two trains of thirty-three cars each. C. & M. R. handled none.
J. REILLY.

THE DISCOVERERS

BY CHAS. C. JONES

ARCTIC waste or tropic jungle, mountain peak or ocean key,
Some to tell of fabled cities, some of buried trove and lone,
Into earth's remotest places, where the unknown hazards be,
Men have gone—and go—a-seeking each a something all his own.
And they talk of gold or glory, each as it may chance to fall,
But they seek the selfsame treasure—neither pride of fame nor pelf;
For the trail of great adventure leads her seekers, one and all,
To that Land of High Endeavor where a man may find—himself!



Before Marquette

A Three-Part Story

Part I

by Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton

Authors of "On Guard," "The White Indians," etc.

"WHAT?" roared the governor. "Five hundred pounds less than last year!"

"Five hundred and sixty-two pounds, six shillings, your Excellency," replied his secretary.

Sir William Berkeley struck the table with his jeweled snuff-box and rose to his feet. He shook back the lace cuffs from his wrists impatiently and strode across the room to the window.

"There were more traders?" he asked finally, without turning.

"Two more than the year before, your Excellency."

"And we've killed off none of the savages. Has less fur been taken, or have we not received it?"

"There is no reason, your Excellency, to believe that the savages have taken less. They are eager enough for the goods."

The governor wheeled and faced his secretary.

"What would you do, an you were in my place?" he demanded.

"You wish me to advise your Excellency?"

"Call it what you will. I care not whether it be advisement or expostulation. I know this much. All fur of the colony, every hide and hair, is to pass through my hands, and it does not. I am indifferent to the few paltry pounds I lose, but there is sedition, rebellion, defiance of the king and of the king's will, in this."

The secretary discreetly remained silent while the governor paced from the table to the window and back. The plier of quills knew his excellency too well to attempt speech now. Any word would be incautious in the face of the rising tempest. He was surprised, however, when Sir William, his eyes thoughtful, the storm cloud passed, suddenly stopped and asked—

"Is that disgraceful son of Captain Jeffreys in the gaol?"

"He is, your Excellency."

"They tell me that he has been to the Blue Mountains, has traveled far to the north, even to the Plymouth Company's lands."

"Even farther, your Excellency, if report be true. I have heard that he has crossed the St. Lawrence, that he spent a year with the French."

"The St. Lawrence, eh? That's where the fur is found in plenty, and where none escapes. And I've heard it said that, with the exception of the Longhouses, the Indians are always friendly to the French."

Still thoughtful, the governor turned again to the window and looked out over the river, the far reaches of which were tinted with that first, fresh, delicate green of budding leaves. At last he spoke quickly, decisively:

"Bring me the charges against this young Jeffreys, all of them. Write them out, clearly and at length."

An hour later the secretary placed a neatly copied sheet before the governor.

"Now," commanded Sir William, "have the warder of the gaol conduct this young rover before me at once."

"Here, your Excellency!"

"Yes, here!" and the governor's face grew red with his fury. "Here in this room, and at once!"

Sir William had read the paper through three times before there was a knock.

"Come in!" he thundered, and the door opened to admit his secretary.

"He has been brought, your Excellency."

The governor looked up to see a strange figure framed by the big-planked portal. Not in the gold and lace and bright colors of the gentry of Virginia was he clothed, nor in the rough costume of an indented servant. On his feet were moccasins, beaded, the tops rolling over to escalloped edges. His legs, long, straight, and not too heavy, were encased in buckskin leggings, and down each outer seam was a long fringe of the leather.

He wore a shirt of woolen and over it a buckskin jacket that reached below his hips and around the edges, across the shoulders and down the arms of which were long fringes like those of the leggings. On his head was a cap made of the skins of mink, and hanging from the top of it was the long, bushy tail of a gray fox.

The garb, strange as it was, held the governor's attention for only a moment. The face under the brown cap, smooth-shaven, brown, was one the handsome Royalist himself would have envied in his youth. The forehead was high and wide. The eyes, gray, steady and frank, were wide apart. The lips were full but slightly compressed, and beneath was a chin that was as square as the perfect symmetry of the face would permit.

There was no question, no curiosity, no cringing, in the gaze that met the governor's. There was something stately yet free in the poise of the head, and the lithe figure, while it seemed molten within the leathern garments, still had that easy dignity and grace of carriage which distinguishes the animals the skins had once clothed.

"Your hat, sirrah!" thundered Sir William.

With a smile the young man in the doorway plucked the fur helmet from his head, and still with a smile he stood looking at the governor.

"Begone!" commanded his Excellency with a nod to his secretary.

The amanuensis slipped out past the silent figure that still stood in the doorway.

"Come hither."

The young man entered, and behind him came two armed guards from the gaol.

"I said begone!" cried the governor.

"But, your Excellency," expostulated one of the men with a glance toward the prisoner.

"Begone, and close the door to!"

"NOW, sirrah, you are Richard Jeffreys, eh?" he continued when he and the young man were alone.

"The same," was the calm reply.

"The son of Captain Jeffreys of Jeffreys Manor?"

"The same."

Sir William picked up the paper his secretary had prepared.

"And yet you, the son of an honorable, God-fearing, loyal subject of the king, a son who should be the pride of his father, lie in gaol under the charge of failure to attend church, blasphemy, failure to plant corn, illicit trade with the Indians, smuggling furs and seditious utterances. There is proof enough to hang you three times over."

"So I have been told," agreed the young man calmly.

"Been told! And do you have to be told when you shatter every law of the colony?"

"I am sometimes a stranger to the colony and its laws do not always follow me. It would interest me greatly to read the laws as they stand today. I am sure they would be enlightening."

"Read!" shouted the governor. "You can read?"

"Assuredly."

"And I, who have thanked God often enough that there were no schools or printing presses in the colony, live to see the like of the heathen savages stand before me with this insolent boast of his learning!"

His excellency, purple with passion, rid himself of enough finable oaths to stand his own proud figure upon the gallows ten times over. He stopped only when his vision cleared of the rage mist and he found the young man looking at him with unconcealed interest and a slight smile upon his lips.

"It pleases me," he said when the governor was silent at last, "that the laws have been so broadened that a slip of the tongue or righteous anger can no longer send a man dangling at a rope's end."

The thrust served to renew the storm, and through it all the young man stood across the table, his eyes twinkling with amusement. Where his words had failed, his attitude, his hidden laughter, served to bring the governor to his senses.

"The rope's end, knotted, noosed, awaits you!" his excellency said fiercely. "But aside with that. It matters not now. There is another reason I have for bringing you here. They tell me you have been to the Blue Mountains."

"Yes, and beyond."

"Beyond!"

Sir William's anger fell from him as a cloak might drop from his shoulders. He leaned forward across the table, his eyes eager, his bearing no longer that of the king's ruler of Virginia Colony.

"Then," he said at last, his voice husky, "have you seen the South Sea, the Red Sea, what they call the Gulf of California?"

"No," answered young Jeffreys, the smile in his eyes verging upon laughter. "Had I seen it, it might be that the noose would be unknotted were I to lead your men to it?"

"I would cut it with mine own sword, for the South Sea means gold, and the king needs gold."

"King!"

Jeffreys stiffened and his face hardened. "Why should the gold be the king's?" he asked. "Has he ever left England? Has he ever seen this land? Have his minions ever seen it?"

"It is the king's domain!" snapped the governor. "His by right of discovery, by right of conquest, by the right God has given him."

"God has given him! God made that land but he never destined it for a king. There lies not an inch of king's land beyond the Blue Mountains, and there never will. That land is too broad, too fair, too pleasant. A king's wish would be lost in it, a king's voice would echo in vain among its hills, a king's lungs would wither if they once inhaled the pure air that sweeps the plains. God set aside that land for men, and some day they will take it."

He stopped suddenly and smiled at the horror-stricken face of the governor.

"I feel the noose tighten," he mocked.

"You will before tomorrow's sun rises," whispered his excellency between clenched teeth. "Where did you learn this sedition? Your father?"

"Leave my father out of this," answered Jeffreys sharply. "He lives his own life. I live mine. He was born in England. He is a good man, true to his teachings, to this absurd theory that a man, by divine right, can oppress other men.

"But I was born in the colony of Virginia. I have never seen a king, and, thank God, no king has ever seen the land of my birth, nor ever will. My thoughts are mine own. I could have no others, after seeing this land of men beyond the Blue Mountains."

"You have preached this?" asked the governor, the words coming with difficulty.

"There are others who think and preach the same? Tell me. They may sever your noose."

Jeffreys laughed outright.

"The governor seems to wish that I cheat the gallows," he said, with a suggestion of interrogation in his tone.

"I would hang you and every traitor of your ilk with the greatest joy, and hang you will tomorrow at dawn, unless——"

His excellency paused and Jeffreys said with a smile:

"Unless——"

"You are young, you have wit, and with that wit must go courage to take you past the Blue Mountains, where no white men have been. There is yet hope for you. The king needs you. There is this. Have you ever preached such sedition to others?"

"My thoughts have always been vague, unformed. They came to my mind as the air beyond the Blue Mountains came to my lungs. Perhaps it is the air in that land that breeds them. I only know it is not so close as this in the colony. It seems untainted. But when the thoughts came to me I did not rush back and preach them. Perhaps I would some time. I had no intention of doing so today until you drove me to it."

"I!" cried Berkeley. "I! But let that lie. You have not spoken so to others. And you say your thoughts are vague. There is something that may dispel them, as the sun sweeps the fog from the river in the morning. Love of life would do that."

The governor paused and studied the young man's face. The laughing eyes told him nothing.

"Give me your attention," he said at last, straightening in his chair and speaking quickly, as if he had reached a decision and wished the matter settled. "They tell me you have been north, past the St. Lawrence?"

"Yes. I spent a year with the French."

"Then you know something of the fur trade, of the methods they employ, of how they keep on such amiable terms with the savages?"

"My eyes were always open, and I had many opportunities."

"Good! The fur trade of Virginia is not as it should be. There is need of a better understanding with the Indians, though, God knows, I have done all I could do to placate them."

"Placate, exactly," interrupted Jeffreys.

"Quiet, sirrah!" shouted the governor. "Your life is at stake. This fur business must be controlled as the king would have it. Unlicensed traders are visiting the Indians. The Dutch are smuggling. One of their ships was in the Chesapeake only last week. A man must go among the Indians, win them completely, and he must catch these outlaw traders red-handed, must find where they meet the smugglers and bring the information that will permit us to apprehend them."

"Combine the offices of envoy and spy," smiled Jeffreys.

"Silence!" roared the governor. "There is no spying on outlaws and traitors. This would be in the service of the king. The gallows are waiting for you, the gallows or this."

Jeffreys in no way showed surprise, but he did turn and look out of the window, at the broad river, placid in the late afternoon of an early Spring day, at the sun glinting from the freshly budding leaves.

"You are young, you love life, as I can see now by your glance at the sunshine," continued the governor. "Take an oath of allegiance to his majesty here before me, mend your ways, and Captain Jeffreys' son may live to be a credit to him, to him and to his king. No one will ever know. Come, be quick! Say the word and you live."

"Now?"

"This moment! My patience can not last longer."

"But you are asking me to make myself over instanter, to implant in myself new thoughts, new ideas, a new mind, a new heart. I have always been free, wandering where I wished, and the life has been sweet. The odor of a wigwam is not washed from a man in an hour."

"You hesitate between life and death?"

"Between death and the manner of life," and Jeffreys glanced out of the window at the long shadows. "I wish three hours in which to adjust myself. My mind is slow and can not be spurred."

"You deserve not three minutes. But you may wait. Only remember that the noose is certain at dawn."

"And I will send you word from the gaol?" asked Jeffreys, the smile again in his eyes.

"No. I will have you brought here. There are other things beside the fur of which I would speak. When that is attended to there is the South Sea. You not only have the opportunity of life but of honor, of achievement for your king, and of your king's gratitude."

"In three hours I will tell you."

His excellency struck the table with his fist and cried—

"Warder!"

The door opened and Jeffreys was led away.

A FEW minutes later he stood looking out between the bars of his cell. It was the supper hour and the street beneath him was empty of all except two or three hurrying servants.

Jeffreys' eyes, however, were on the tops of the trees, where the sun still lingered. His ears were tuned only for the twitter of industrious nest-builders in the sycamore across the way. It was life, budding, joyous life, that he saw and heard all about him, and he smiled, though not wistfully, or longingly.

"Dick! Dick!" came a stifled cry beneath him.

"Betsykins!" he exclaimed even before he looked down. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh, Dick!" and the girl, who was no more than seventeen, looked up with streaming eyes and blanched face. "Is it true? Are they going to—to—to hang you in the morning?"

"So they say. Before the sun comes up again. But what brings you here? You must hasten away or there will be talk of you."

"I had to, Dick. Father was coming to Jamestown this morning and I made him bring me. He is waiting now in the minister's house, wondering where I am, for I ran away. Oh, Dick! I had to see you again! I——"

She stopped speaking and covered her face with her hands. Even so far above her he could hear her sobs.

"Come, come, Betsykins," he whispered. "You must run back. Some one will see you. When does your father return to Carver Manor?"

"At once."

"Then hasten to him, for he will be waiting."

"But Dick. They can't hang you! They must not!"

"Come," and his tone was a little impatient. "You must go."

"I care not if I am seen. I had to talk to you again, Dick."

"And talk with me you shall, this very night, little Betsy," he whispered, his face pressed between the bars. "I thought I had not a friend in the colony, and now when one comes she deserves the best, deserves what she wishes. Come, now. Run along to the minister's that your father may not be delayed. And tonight, at nine o'clock, be in the little grove of sycamores below your father's wharf."

"Dick! Don't jest!"

"I am not jesting. Go quickly, and tonight I'll talk to you for fifteen minutes."

"But Dick! You are in a cell, guarded. And at dawn——"

Again she hid her face in her hands.

"Elizabeth," whispered Dick sharply, "leave at once! Some one is coming up the street and you must not be seen talking with a gaolbird."

"But the guards! Those bars!"

"They are nothing, for I go on a king's mission," and he laughed softly. "Remember! The sycamores at nine. I will be waiting for you."

CHAPTER II

THE TRYST AT THE SYCAMORES

"WELL?" demanded Governor Berkeley when the door closed and he and Dick Jeffreys were alone.

The young man's head was bent, his easy, confident bearing had vanished, and he stared down at the table between him and his excellency.

"Does the noose have to tighten about your neck before your wild brain will come to itself and act?"

"It is hard to decide," was the hesitating answer. "You see, I do not know all that I am to do, all that is required of me."

"First of all, sirrah, you are required to acknowledge your king, to swear allegiance anew and to remain loyal to him and to the church. That is no more than is required of any subject of his gracious majesty. Nay, it is a privilege of which any one in the colony should be glad.

"Secondly, you must abandon the wild ideas to which you so heedlessly gave voice this afternoon. You must be loyal in thought as well as in action."

"And then?"

"Following that," and the governor leaned forward, his elbows on the table, his haughtiness giving way to sudden intentness, "there is the fur trade. You have knowledge of the Indians, you understand the methods of the French. You know something of the outlaw traders who are smuggling pelts to the Dutch. That must be stopped, and you, with the power of the king behind you, are to stop it.

"That done, and it should be accomplished in a year, there is the matter of the South Sea, the Red Sea of the Spanish, the Gulf of California, the way to the Indies. There is this kingdom of Quivira, which the Spaniards never found, which is a second Peru. There is gold, and there are pearls and rubies across the Blue Mountains somewhere. They can not be far, for the Indians say that the Eastern Sea beats against a rock from which our own Roanoke flows.

"The French are pushing westward to the headwaters of the St. Lawrence. Already they have reports of the great water only a little way beyond. We can not let them find and take this land, these rich treasures, while we sit idle. True, the king has sent no commands, has not expressed a wish, but we would not be loyal subjects were we to cast aside opportunities for new empires."

"I am to find these treasures for the king?" asked Dick, looking up for the first time.

"Would you take them for yourself, you, a gaolbird?"

"Would I risk the savages and strange lands, famine and thirst, for a man I never saw, never will see, who has done nothing for me?"

"Egad, sirrah! Another word of that and you will fatten the crows. I'm offering you a chance for your life and you quibble! Dost not know that the king is the appointed of God, that he rules by God's right, and that thou, a crawling worm upon God's footstool, art answerable to the king?"

"Perhaps I have been away from the colony too much," answered Dick slowly.

He had turned toward the window. His countenance was pensive, though in his eyes, which the governor could not see, was a gleam of amusement, a twinkle that belied the seriousness of his tone when he continued:

"I have been in many far places, among the savages, across mountain ranges, beside great lakes, on the banks of wide rivers, on the edges of fertile plains. I had never given much thought to kings and men until then. Somehow, perhaps as the air came to my nostrils, things came to my mind out there. The sun was warm, the flowers were bright and carpeted the ground, the birds sang in the trees, the winds faintly rustled the leaves. It was fair, a heaven upon earth. Life was full, complete.

"Then I remembered things as they were in the colony, men sold to slavery because they dared think, men better than I who had dared oppose a king's will, branded because they sought that freedom I had for the taking. I remembered the whippings and the pillory here in Jamestown, the binding laws and the cramping customs. And yet, only half a hundred leagues away, I was beyond the influence of kings and kings' laws, out where the air and sky and water and woods were free, where a man could think and pray and swear with only his own consciousness of what is right to govern him.

"And that fair land, that free land, you ask me to go and take in the name of a king, in the name of all that which is not free. You ask me for the sake of my life to bind a country and a people with the thongs which bind Virginia, to stifle and oppress, to enslave and degrade."

He wheeled suddenly from the window and leaned across the table, peering into the purple, distorted, shocked face of Sir William.

"Have you noticed," he said, "that not once, this evening or today, have I addressed you as 'your Excellency,' or even as 'sir'? I'll tell you why. You have not my respect. In the name of this king you have ruled this colony. In the name of your own love of power, your own selfishness, your own disregard for the rights, the hearts and the minds of your fellow-beings, you have refused the people the right to elect their own representatives. You have condemned men to death because you liked not the color of their hair. You have grown fat while honest men, men who dared tell what they think, have slaved in this colony without enough to eat or wear.

"I tell you, Governor Berkeley, you and your kind have come to the wrong land. It may be that God gave your king the right to rule. You may believe that, or attempt to make others believe it, if you will. But I know that God set aside this land for men, for kingless men, for the rule of right and justice. And I tell you now, Governor Berkeley, that before a hundred years have passed men will rule this land."

For a full minute he stared straight into his excellency's eyes, a procedure that only increased the anger which already so choked the governor he could not speak. Dick's own eyes were dancing, and their glee lifted the corners of his mouth. Then suddenly, as Sir William was about to gain sufficient control to voice his rage, the young man burst into a low laugh.

"There! That is said!" he cried. "A mouth-filling speech, was it not? The greater part of it I learned from a trapper, a Puritan, with whom I spent a Winter beyond New Amsterdam, or New York I believe it is now. A queer old bookworm. I have often wished I could try it on some one like yourself, but I never thought I would have the pleasure. I never dreamed that your own avarice would some time give me this opportunity to speak with you alone, that your own fear of the slipping power of kings, your dread of the intoxication of the free air of this land, would make you stoop to plotting here in this room with a gaolbird. But I have had my chance. I have taken it. Now this other of which you speak. To be sure, I——"

He stopped and peered again into the

governor's face, smiled when he saw that perplexity and lack of understanding were effacing his excellency's rage.

DICK straightened, threw back his shoulders, turned his head carelessly toward the window. Languidly he raised his arms. Then suddenly his hands shot down, his body seemed to drop and the next instant he had leaped up and forward.

Before the astonished governor could think or move the young man was crouching on his heels on the table directly in front of him. His laughing face was thrust forward to within a foot of the outraged visage.

Sir William Berkeley was no coward, but neither was he a match for the young athlete before him. At his first movement, the first parting of his lips, Dick's hands reached out. One grasped his excellency's throat, the other closed his mouth and bent back his head.

"Not a move, or your own breast shall sheath your dagger," whispered the laughing Dick. "Not a sound, for sounds do not now accord with my plan. We have talked, and to no purpose. You offered me a noose or a place to suckle at the breast of the royal sow. Do you remember the eagle an Indian brought to the tavern a few years ago and which hung in a cage at the door? You asked me to become as that eagle, asked me, who have known the free air of a free land, to submit to a king's fetters. And do you remember how one day that eagle grasped the hand of a drawer at the tavern when the cage door was open and how he fought his way out to freedom?

"Even now your own hand is in the eagle's grip. I knew this afternoon your fear for your unjust profits in the fur trade was greater than your desire to punish what you term sedition. I knew you would have me here again tonight, and I knew that thereby you would give me my chance."

Sir William Berkeley's face became purple under the pressure. The grip of Dick's fingers was like that of a smith's vise, but now it suddenly loosened and he whipped from his waist a long sash which he had not worn in the afternoon.

"I will leave this with your excellency as a memento," he said as he loosened his other hand and drew the sash across Sir William's mouth and tied it. "I got it from the French last year. You see it is long, long enough to bind your excellency's arms as well as his mouth. There! Now for the feet. This cord from the draperies seems destined to meet my needs."

He leaped to the floor and in another moment had securely fastened the feet of the half-conscious governor to his chair. As he straightened up and surveyed his work his eyes clouded.

"I require time," he said thoughtfully. "It might be that you will be able to utter some sound before I have passed beyond your reach. This drapery will serve," and he tore it from a window.

As he was about to swathe Sir William's head and shoulders in the thick curtain he stopped and smiled into the eyes that glared into his.

"It was great sport, your Excellency," he cried mockingly. "I have enjoyed this afternoon and evening more than I had ever expected to enjoy an entertainment. The bear-baiting your cavaliers seem to dote upon never approached this for pure sport. And as for the noose of which you boasted——"

He laughed softly and then flung the curtain about the governor's head and shoulders, binding it on with the long cord from another drapery. The work completed to his satisfaction, he bent over so that his lips were close to the governor's ear.

"If your Excellency wishes me, I will be at the South Sea," he whispered. "Some of the king's own will surely be brave enough to seek me there."

He laughed again and patted the shrouded head.

"Thanks, many thanks, for an enjoyable evening," he said. "I only regret that it is not possible for me to laugh aloud."

He walked across to the window, opened it, and sprang out. Crouching, keeping in the shadows, he made his way to the river.

Dick Jeffreys had not planned heedlessly. In the afternoon he had seen Indians on the streets of Jamestown, Indians who, he knew, had come by water. He was certain where they had beached their canoes, and five minutes after he had left Government House he was in one and headed up-stream. Two hours later, breathless, for he had paddled hard, he drew in to shore at a clump of sycamores. As he stepped out he listened a moment and then whistled softly.

"Dick!" cried a voice from the darkness above him. "Dick! Is it you? Oh, Dick!"

"Not so loud, Betsykins," he whispered as he climbed the bank to the girl's side.

"Dick! How did you get away? Has the governor turned you free?"

"Yes," he answered as he sat down on the bank and rocked back and forth, holding his sides and attempting, sometimes vainly, to stifle his laughter.

"Betsy," he finally said, "it was the most comical time I have ever had. The poor old simpleton! His fur trade is getting away from him and he wants it back. It's his perquisite from the king, though the colony is supposed to have granted him alone the right to trade. And now that it is slipping he was willing to grant me my head and my liberty, forget my past, if I would but tame his Indians and spy upon the outlaw traders and Dutch smugglers."

"Then you are free!" the girl cried ecstatically. "You will cease roaming and —and talking so freely! You will settle down, Dick?"

"If I settle down, Betsykins, it will be a thousand leagues from Virginia. Wait until tomorrow. The greatest roar that ever came out of Government House will be heard as far back as the Blue Mountains. I wonder—I wonder—" and he broke off to indulge in another fit of silent laughter.

"Dick!" protested Elizabeth. "Dick! Tell me! What have you done?"

Repeating at length and with interpolations his conversations with Sir William both in the afternoon and evening, stopping often to chuckle over his thrusts and their reception by Royalist ears, and ending with a detailed description of how his excellency had appeared when he leaped on to the table and squatted close to his astonished face, Dick related what had happened.

During the recital Elizabeth Carver, who had seated herself beside him on the ground, listened with increasing fear. When at last he had finished she did not speak, was too shocked, too stunned, too greatly overwhelmed by the knowledge of what his recklessness had brought upon his head.

"I only wish," Dick himself broke the silence, "that I could be a mouse beneath the tavern floor and hear the wits of Jamestown recount the affair, if the wits or any one else ever hear the true report from the governor's lips."

"What are you going to do now?" asked Elizabeth in a strained, unnatural voice.

"Lead Sir William's trainbands a merry chase for a week or so and then strike north to the French settlements," was the ready answer. "There's the place for adventure, Betsykins. The savages are friendly, except the Longhouses. Fur is plenty, and a man may live as he wishes, without laws telling how to breathe as well as think."

"And," she asked in a strained whisper, "you will not come back?"

"To stick my head into Sir William's anxious noose? To be told what I shall eat and wear and plant and swear, how I shall pray and what price to pay? Ha, ha, ha!" and again he held his sides in an effort to stifle his mirth.

"No, no, Betsykins. I've tasted the wine of freedom and this Virginia sack has become bitter. I'd feel like that panther your brother tried to tame were I to remain in the colony. There's a wide land out there to the north and west, a land where a man may think and live and speak as he chooses, where there never was a king and his persecution and never will be, where a man can be himself and not the stayed, beruffled manikin the king and his court would have him."

A SUPPRESSED exclamation from Elizabeth brought a sudden stop to Dick's exuberance.

"Forgive me, little friend," he said penitently. "I had forgotten that you are the king's own, Royalist to the tips of your pretty fingers. But I couldn't resist the opportunity to bait Sir William. There is a zest in placing your head inside the lion's mouth and jerking it out before he can snap his jaws. And the thought of it is so fresh I could not but tell of it. Oh, Betsykins! Could you have but seen his face! Even the daughter of so stanch a cavalier as Charles Carver would have laughed, if not Colonel Carver himself. It—why, Betsy, what is it? Forgive me, little friend. I'll tell no more of it."

For a moment he listened to the girl's sobs as she sat beside him in the darkness beneath the sycamores, her hands covering her face. The first twinge of remorse came to him, silenced the laughter in a heart whose thoughtless recklessness had turned gray the hair of his father and had deprived him, though never to his regret, of his place in the cavalier aristocracy of Virginia.

To Dick Jeffreys, roamer, playmate of savages, friend of outlaw traders, there had never been anything attractive in the plantation life. The Summer his mother had died, when he was fourteen, he had first run away with the Indians. Before he was eighteen his father, scandalized, stern, demanding obedience, had forbidden him to come near the plantation, and the same night had sent a trusted overseer to induce Dick to return.

Elizabeth Carver, seven years younger, boyhood playmate, now at the dawn of womanhood, was still a playmate to the careless Dick, still a companion as well as the only person in the colony who dared risk a word with him. Even as he sat there in the darkness, distressed by her sobs, accusing himself for having hurt her, she was still to him the little girl who had joined so whole-heartedly in the games he and her brother had arranged, the same stanch comrade, the same worshiper of his boyish escapades. The years had passed lightly with Dick Jeffreys, and he thought less of the passage of time with others.

He was altogether mystified then when Elizabeth suddenly lifted her head and said coldly—

"You will never come back to Virginia."

"Not while Sir William is governor."

"Then I will never see you again."

"I don't know, Betsy. I never looked that far ahead."

"Dick," and her tone softened, "won't you ever grow up?"

"Some time, when the fun of living begins to grow less."

She was silent for a moment and then she arose.

"I suppose you are going on up the river," she said quietly. "I must leave now. They will wonder where I am."

"Yes, I must be going. The trainbands will be on the trail soon and the forest will be a bedlam with the bloodhounds turned loose. Oh, they'll press close to the Blue Mountains and peer into every thicket to find me. It's going to be great sport, beating them, covering the trail, doubling, playing the fox, almost as much sport as baiting Sir William himself. But I must not give them too much time. Good-by, little——"

Suddenly the girl stepped close and grasped his arm, clung to him in a new terror.

"Dick!" she whispered. "It's too late! They've cut you off."

He, too, had heard the sound of pounding hoofs on the road less than a hundred yards back from the river. Up and down every highway, on every stream, the hunters were spreading. Every plantation would have the news before morning. Every path, every river, every bit of cover, would be watched, searched, guarded. Even the Indians, with promises of rum to spur them on, would search for his footprints. The bloodhounds, eager after sniffing his cot in the gaol, would scatter through the swamps and woods.

"Egad!" whispered Dick. "They will give me a run for it!"

"You can't go!" Elizabeth protested. "It is too late. You are cut off on the river and on the land. They are arousing your own father's house even now. Listen, Dick! There is only one way. The cabin we built when we were children, back of the tobacco sheds. It is still there in the pines, with its little attic which you arranged for me to hide in when we played Indian massacre. No one ever goes near it, or thinks of it. Wait here a few moments. Then go there. I'll see that you get food and water every day."

"No, no, Betsy!" he protested. "I can't hide behind a woman's skirts. I've started this— Betsy!"

He sprang forward but it was too late. The girl had jumped down the bank and with one thrust of her strong young arms had sent his light canoe far out into the current.

"It was the only way, Dick," she panted as she turned to face him. "It was sure death to go on by water or by land. They will never consider to look for you so near Jamestown. If they see that canoe they'll only think you took to the forest farther up the river. In two weeks the search will be abandoned and you can get to the Blue Mountains in perfect safety."

He was silent, for he knew that she spoke the truth, but when he did attempt to speak she interrupted.

"I'll see that food and water are carried to you daily, Dick. And when I know the search has been given up I'll send you a musket and powder and ball. That will be the signal that all is well, that you may go. Now I say good-by."

Choking back the tears, striving to keep her voice steady, she held out her hand. He dropped to one knee and pressed it to his lips.

"You're a jewel, little Betsykins," he whispered. "If you had only been a boy!"

"Oh," she cried, as though in sudden pain.

With an effort she regained control of herself and when she did speak again it was gently, almost compassionately.

"Good-by, Dick," she said. "I am going to ask only one thing before you go, for I won't see you again. Please remember that, no matter where you go or what you do, no matter what you may now think you believe or care about, that always, always, Dick, I will have faith that you will never forget that you are the son of a gentleman or that you are at heart a gentleman yourself."

CHAPTER III

BEYOND THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

FOR more than a league Dick Jeffreys had been pushing straight north through the sand. His feet slipped backward with each step and their soles were blistered from the heat of the open places where the sun beat down with all its August intensity. His way led through scattered patches of scrub oak, sometimes hardly high enough to afford shelter, and across blistering bare spots where no plant could find nourishment.

"It's worse than the sands along the shore of Virginia and the Carolinas," he panted. "And I've heard that the Spaniards' country is like this and that it is easy to die of the thirst there."

He stopped suddenly and dropped the butt of his musket to the ground. It was not a halt of fear lest he had wandered into the Spanish possessions with their attendant dangers of death by thirst or at the hands of Mexico's conquerors, for Dick's shoulders shook and his face was contorted by his efforts to suppress his laughter. Since April he had not dared even sneeze. Hundreds of leagues through an unknown land, four months of dodging strange savages, escapes innumerable, had given him a caution he had not believed possible.

"If I had done it!" he whispered when at last he had mastered his mirth. "If, after baiting Sir William in his own den and then telling him he could look for me at the South Sea if he wanted to speak with me, though I had intended to strike in the opposite direction for the land of the French; if, after his offer of my life an I would find the land of gold for his king, and my laughing at his offer, if, after all that, I should run west from these devilish Conestogas and be chased farther west by the still more devilish Eries, and then west and north again by savages who did not even permit me to stop and ask their names——"

He stopped, again a victim of his desire to laugh, and the tears were in his eyes when at last he lifted his musket and started on through the hot sand.

"If, after all that," he whispered to himself, "I should blunder into this South Sea, this Red Sea, this Gulf of California, wouldn't it be a joke on Sir William?"

He plunged and slipped through the sand and brush, unmindful of the labor of travel and of the heat in his new-found amusement.

"Wouldn't it be a joke on Sir William and his king," he continued in a whisper, for a man can not spend four months alone in the wilderness without sometimes voicing his thoughts aloud, "if I should find this fabled sea and its gold and its rubies when I can't go back to tell them of it for fear they'll hang me. They'd rather have their precious notions of divine right and the like unbattered than all the wealth of the Indies.

"Oh, well! They need not trouble themselves. If I keep on far enough and long enough, and the savages are not too persistent, I'll arrive in the land of the French somehow, and then heigh-ho! A long life and a merry one, a free land and a kingless one! By Winter I'll be in my future home."

The character of the country had changed suddenly as he talked to himself. His eyes were always moving, up and down, to this side and that, never missing a depression of the sand or the possibilities of a particularly dense thicket, the shaking of a bit of grass or the blue of the sky unmarred by a whiff of smoke. These precautions were second nature, as automatic and as necessary to his continued existence as his respiration and the beating of his heart.

Consciously, however, he had not seen the opening ahead, the sudden termination of the scrub oak and other small growth, until he found himself at the base of a hill of sand. It rolled upward gently, its surface wrinkled by waves like those on a small lake beneath a gentle breeze. There was no vegetation, nothing except sand.

After a hasty survey of the country to the right and left, Dick started up the long slope. From its crest he found a higher hill of sand beyond, and all about him the sun beat down in scorching fury, while from the ground a heat almost as intense arose.

From the second hill there was nothing to be seen except an ocean of rolling sand, sand, hill after hill, valley after valley, and all bare as water itself.

"I'll have one more look from that next hill," thought Dick aloud. "It's higher, and it may be that I can see to the end of it. If not, I'll turn back. I'm so dry now I'm cracking, and there's no chance for water in such a desert."

He climbed slowly to the top of the third hill, for his musket and pack were heavy and the heat was becoming unbearable. As his feet slipped in the last few steps he stopped suddenly and stared.

"*Mon Dieu*, as Monsieur Crapaud would say were he in my place!" exclaimed Dick. "It is the sea, the South Sea, the Gulf of California! I started out to find the French and I have found the Spanish. It's back I'll have to turn, for I'd rather risk the pine splinters of the savages than the work of those Spanish devils."

Before him, stretching to the horizon at the north and as far as he could see to the east and west, was a great sheet of blue water. Between him and the shore the sand sloped gradually to a huge crescent beach. He could see along this rim of sand for leagues in both directions, but nowhere, either on land or on the sea, was there evidence of human occupation.

"Spaniards or no Spaniards, I'm going to say that I've been to the South Sea, though why they should call it the Red Sea I fail to understand. I never saw water more blue, or more of it, even in the Western ocean, for that matter. Here's to say I've waded into it."

He was still half a mile from the water and the sand slipped and burned his feet. In the excitement of his discovery he had forgotten his thirst for the moment, but now, with so much water before him, it returned redoubled.

"Egad, and I could drink it, salt and all!" he muttered as he trudged slowly on.

A short distance from the beach Dick's automatic habits of observation became active and his mind began to turn over the messages brought to him.

"No surf though it is an open sea."

"No tide marks."

"No smell like that the sea is never without."

He stopped at the water's edge.

"That's strange," he muttered.

Then he suddenly lifted his musket above his head and strode into the shallow water, which lay without movement, as if prostrated by the heat.

"In the name of Charles the Second, King of England, I claim this sea and all the land bordering thereon!" he cried. "There! I've settled accounts with Sir William. His desire is quenched. Now I must quench my thirst."

HE LAUGHED aloud for, though his parched throat made of the effort little more than a cackle, there was no one to overhear, no savage to bring his tribe upon him. Suddenly he stopped and looked at the water between his feet. Then he stooped, cupped his hand and brought it dripping to his lips.

"Sweet!" he cried. "Sweet as any nectar, though if I had eggs here I could boil them in it. This water is as warm as that of the James, though it is clear and pure."

He rinsed out his mouth several times, let a little trickle down his throat and at last began to drink slowly from his cupped hands.

"No Red Sea or Gulf of California is this," he said when he was satisfied and had risen to look about him. "It is one of the great lakes they told me of on the St. Lawrence, though which one I don't know how I'm to learn. But anyhow it is the land of the French. Their traders have seen all five of them and even now will be arriving with their goods. I have only to follow the shores until I find traces of them, and if I do meet savages I need not fear. They'll never know me from a Frenchman."

The conviction that he had reached one of the five great lakes of which the French had told him, that he was at last in the land he had sought when he had slipped out of Virginia four months before, served to revive him as much as the water. He looked toward the east and then the west and could see no difference in the great, curving beach.

"One way is as good as another," he said. "I'm as sure of finding a Frenchman on the left as the right, and so long as I've been traveling west and north I'll keep on."

He turned to the left and started along the hard sand close to the water. It was a little damp and consequently not so hot as the desert through which he had toiled in the morning. The nearness of the water, too, was a comfort, while the fact that he was a fair sight for any eyes within miles did not concern him. He believed he was in a land where the savages were friendly to the only white men they knew, the French, and if he did encounter one he could obtain some information as to the rendezvous of the traders.

Though Dick walked steadily all afternoon he failed to find any traces of savages or French. He did come to the end of the sand but only to find a low, swampy country with great stretches of coarse grass, willows bordering the shore and the whole apparently as lifeless as the dry desert he had crossed. At sunset he reached what appeared to be a small island in the swamp, a higher bit of ground with elms and oaks upon it and, best of all, a mother grouse with a flock seeking a nesting-place for the night in the branches of an oak.

Dick waited patiently until dusk and then swung himself up and began to whack at the stupid birds with a light stick. He knocked down six of the eight and was assured of supper and breakfast. When the sun came out of the sea in the morning he was ready for the day's march, and so certain was he that he had reached the land of the French and friendly savages he started along the shore with a light heart and lips parted in song.

His course had been bending more and more until by mid-forenoon he was going almost straight north. The low, swampy country continued, but farther up the coast he saw the beginning of higher ground and beyond that high bluffs that rose from the water. At noon, while still in the marsh, further progress was arrested by a river. It was too deep to ford, and there was nothing at hand with which to build a raft to float across his few possessions. While he stood there, undecided as to his course, a birchbark canoe swept around the bend above him. In it were three white men.

A smile of contentment on his face, for the end of his four hazardous months had come, Dick stood leaning on his musket, awaiting the strangers. That they were Frenchmen he did not doubt. Men of no other race had ever penetrated so far to the westward. Even at that distance he could distinguish their gray homespun clothing, the bright sashes without which no *coureurs de bois* ever went into the wilderness, and their peculiar "pudding-bag" caps.

That they would be friendly Dick was equally confident. Most of them, he knew, were outlaws like himself, men who had preceded even the Jesuits into the far places along the shores of the Great Lakes, men who traded with the savages without that necessary permit from the king of France. Recognizing no superiors, no laws, no right save that of might and their own inclinations, daring the unknown wilderness and the equally unknown temper of its savage inhabitants, their lives in tune with the wild rapids of the rivers, the fierce storms of the lakes and the fiercer natures of the natives, they appeared to Dick Jeffreys in all the romantic coloring with which his imagination had clothed them. He need only tell them, he knew, that he, too, was an outlaw, a fugitive from the wrath and stifling influence of kings, and they would accept him.

As he stood there the canoe came straight down the center of the river. The three men had seen him as quickly as he had seen them, but had not missed a stroke of their paddles, nor had they in any way indicated that they considered his presence unaccountable.

When they were fifty paces away Dick lifted his right hand and called—"*Bon jour.*"

"*Bon jour, bon jour,*" came a friendly answer from the men in the bow and the middle.

The stern paddler remained silent.

Dick's mother had received a good education in England before she had married Captain Jeffreys and sailed for Virginia. One of the things she had insisted upon Dick learning in his early boyhood was the French language, and his year in New France had served to perfect him in the tongue.

"Wait, comrades," he called. "Give me a moment of your time that I may know whether I am at the Gulf of California, the Eastern ocean or only on one of the five big ponds of the king of France."

The two men in the bow of the canoe

laughed outright, but the one in the stern demanded suspiciously——

"Who are you?"

"I," replied Dick readily, "am like yourself, a rover of the forests, a man without a king, without a home and without a care, and with the one desire—a glass of brandy, a comrade with whom to drink it and never a 'blackrobe' to repress my enjoyment of either."

"*A coureur de bois* like the rest of us!" cried the bowman as he dug the water with his paddle and pulled the canoe nearer shore.

"An Englishman with too ready a tongue!" retorted the stern paddler as he pulled the craft the other way. "Let us be on to the nets."

"Come, come, Basile," objected the man in the bow. "Only yesterday you were saying that there should be four of us, that we have too much for three since Gabriel found that brandy would not float him in the last rapids of the Mattawan. We still have far to go and are in need of a strong back and another paddle. Another musket, too, for that matter. Come, friend, get into the canoe and we'll lift the nets and then talk it over."

He had been pulling the craft closer to shore and the bow touched the bank at Dick's feet.

"Of course, there is no harm in talking of it," agreed the Virginian.

"We want men of our own blood in this, men we know," growled the one addressed as Basile.

"We know he is a man or he wouldn't be here with a million savages between him and his settlement, and we care not of his blood so that we are sure of the heart that pumps it!" cried the bowman. "Get in, friend."

Basile remained silent, though there was an ugly look on his face. Dick glanced at him, smiled good-naturedly, and stepped into the canoe.

They did not speak as they shot down the river under the impetus of four paddles. Dick knew that here was his first opportunity to prove himself, and his spruce blade bent with the force of his arms.

"Enough!" cried Basile at last, and with a swirl of water they brought up at a stick floating at the mouth of the river. The net was quickly overhauled and two score of fish taken. Then, their paddles snapping briskly, they turned up-stream. The two men in the forepart of the canoe broke into a voyageurs' song, obscene and blasphemous but with an air that quickened the paddle strokes and seemed of its own buoyancy to lift the light craft from the water. Dick's body tingled with the thrill of it, swayed to its rhythm, and when they broke into the chorus the second time he joined them joyously.

"Silence!" whispered Basile fiercely as they rounded a bend. "There's some one at the *cabine*."

Quietly now, but as swiftly, they went on between the low, marshy banks. Another bend and they saw the river fork. On a bit of high ground between the two streams a white tent gleamed against the willows. Gliding in and out of the door, shrieking as they bore casks and bales of goods down to their waiting canoes, were a dozen savages.

"Those thieving Miamis!" cried Basile "At them!"

PADDLING fiercely, swearing continuously, searing oaths which Dick had never heard before, the three *coureurs de bois* shot their craft straight toward the Indians. Dick, silent but with leaping heart at this chance of a fray, bent his back as effectively as the others.

The canoe did not slacken speed as it approached the bank. One of the savages, in the act of shakily lifting a gourd to his lips saw the white men and shrieked a warning. At the same instant the canoe struck and its occupants, rising to their feet with the last stroke, landed with an impetus that carried them, muskets swinging about their heads, to the door of the tent.

The savages had taken advantage of the hour's absence of the Frenchmen and, though their brains were inflamed by the liquid fire they had consumed, they were not able to convert their blood-thirsty desires into action. They swayed and tottered as they gathered to meet the attack and half of them went down in the first rush. Three of these were on their feet instantly, however, and when the four white men faced about in front of their tent they were met by a compact group of gleaming brown bodies, flashing knives and swinging hatchets.

Dick, his musket whirling like a flail, did not wait for the attack but sprang forward with an answering yell. Two savages went down before him, but the impetus of the heavy weapon carried him into the center of the group, and a knife slit open his buckskin shirt and gashed his shoulder. Still he kept his musket swinging, with the result that the group was divided and the three Frenchmen, charging together, swept one-half before them into the river.

Back they came to join Dick, who faced the remainder. The savages wavered and then broke for their canoes.

"Get the goods!" cried Basile as he dashed after them. "Unload the canoes first!"

They pursued the fleeing party so closely there was no time for embarking, and as the Indians did not return to the attack, the white men unloaded the canoes and piled the casks and bales of goods upon the bank.

In the meantime the five savages who had been forced into the river had struggled back to shore, all the fight gone out of them. They held up their hands in token of surrender and Basile nodded toward the canoes. The men filed past, lifted their craft into the water and stepped in.

Basile began to speak quickly, sharply, in Miami, a tongue not unlike some Dick had known to the east. The Indians who had retreated up the river bank returned and deposited their weapons in the canoes. The six of them filed past the tent to where three of their comrades lay upon the ground. Without examining the bodies to see whether life had fled, they carried them to the canoes and dropped them in. The next moment their three barks were shooting down the river.

"Eh, Basile?" cried one of the Frenchmen joyously. "What do you think now? Is he not one of us? Oh, that was a pretty charge he made, straight through the thick of them. Come! Shake his hand."

Dick had recognized in Basile the leader of the trio, and from the first the man's dislike had been evident. As he faced him now, flushed from his exertions and by the words of the Frenchman, he saw no lessening in hostility. Rather it seemed to be increased, though now only Basile's eyes gave expression to his feeling. The man's evil face even broke into a forced smile as he held out his hand.

"You fought well and showed your courage," he said to Dick as he stepped forward to meet him. "I hold no objection to your being one of us, after we have had time to hear your story. It is a strange thing, an Englishman so far from his colony. None has ever been here before. But no doubt you can explain it."

His tone was almost gracious, but as Dick looked into his eyes he saw that the words were empty, that he need not seek friendship there.

"Leon! Michel!" Basile cried sharply as he turned to the others. "Get down the river quickly and lift the net. The savages will be back with the darkness, as soon as the brandy soaks out of them. We must be off this cursed Chicago River and down the Riviere Des Plaines before they can find us."

The impatience of his tone, the peevish authority of it, gave Dick his first clew to the reasons back of the man's hostility. He was the leader, not only because of the happy, careless attitude of the other two and their lack of initiative, but because of his own superior mental qualifications. And in the young Virginian he recognized a rival, one not amenable to discipline. Dick laughed outright and bowed to the Frenchman.

"Have no anxiety, monsieur," he said. "I harbor no ambitions, no aspirations except to enjoy life as I find it."

"See that you have no others," growled Basile as he turned away.

CHAPTER IV

"ONE OF US"

DICK JEFFREYS was left alone with Basile when Leon and Michel went down the Chicago River to the lake to recover their net. The Frenchman was busy examining and arranging the goods with which the Indians had attempted to run off, and the Virginian with his shoulder. The cut was only three inches long and little more than through the skin. When he had bathed and bound it the canoe had returned and all four immediately began preparations for departure.

There was no time for Dick to ask questions as to the plans of the party. The Miamis, three of whom they knew were badly wounded if not dead, would be back at night with a larger party, and the urgent need was to get as far away as possible. As to what part of the French country he had reached, what the three *coureurs de bois* intended to do, and the explanation of his own presence in the country, all that could wait until a less strenuous time.

The two canoes of the party were soon loaded and Dick took the bow of one with Michel in the stern. His shoulder was irritated by the exertion of paddling but he said nothing, and their craft, though heavily loaded and propelled against the current, did not lag behind the other.

They paddled all afternoon without stopping and the sun had set when at last they turned ashore. Dick saw a well-beaten path leading from the landing-place out across a low prairie.

"Here's where the toil comes, friend!" cried Michel as he arose stiffly from the canoe.

The men began at once to unload.

"We have a long start and can carry across to the Riviere des Plaines before they come half-way from the lake, even should they be on the right track," said Basile. "But we must lose no time."

Then began the first of many trips. Before the second load was portaged night had fallen, and through the darkness they toiled back and forth, bearing canoes, bales of goods and casks of brandy upon their backs. It was after midnight when the last article had been carried across, and even then there was no rest. The two canoes were loaded and turned downstream and until after sunrise they journeyed on into the southwest.

"Ah, Basile!" cried Michel when the sun was high. "We have left the country of the Miamis and must be in that of the Islinois, where the thieves dare not follow. Let us go ashore and eat and sleep."

Basile turned his canoe toward a good camping-spot. They cooked a meal and then all except Leon stretched out in the shade of some willows. Later Michel was wakened and stood guard, and at noon they were again in the canoes. Until darkness descended upon the river Basile did not permit lagging, and then, after a hasty meal, all four dropped asleep in the long grass on the bank.

The sun had risen high enough to be uncomfortable before they wakened in the morning, and even then they only sought shade and slept a little longer. Dick saw that the Frenchmen did not fear possible pursuit by the Miamis and that they were in no hurry to go on.

He was glad of the opportunity not only to rest but because they could now tell him something of where he was, where they were going and what they intended to do. He was happy because he had reached the land of the French, because he had joined a band of the *coureurs de bois*, but his restless spirit was not content with a mere following of the life of these adventurers, and he had chosen to construe Basile's hostility as a challenge to the leadership of these free spirits of the wilderness. As he had nothing to conceal and recognized the value of frankness in cementing the friendship which he knew he had gained with Leon and Michel, he chose the indolent hours of the forenoon to tell of himself.

"Friends," he began, "my coming among you has seemed strange, and it is as much to me as to yourselves. I will begin at the beginning and tell of myself all that you could care to know.

"First, my name is Richard Jeffreys, generally called Dick, which is the English method of saying Richard if one of that name be a close friend. My father is Captain Jeffreys of the colony of Virginia, in which I was born twenty-four years ago. Had I followed precedent I would now be a gay cavalier, riding a good horse from plantation to plantation, dressed in silks and satins and lace and gold, a sword at my side, a dagger in my belt and never without a quart of sack in my belly. I would have had slaves and a chest of money, acres of tobacco and possibly, in time, a seat in the House of Burgesses.

"But you see I am not. Why? Because in Virginia a man may let his body wander at will between tavern and plantation, between bear-baiting and carousing, while he must leave his mind at home under a lock and key furnished by the king. He must think as the king prescribes, swear only as much as the king permits, go to church or the gallows, and even on his own land plant what the king decides.

"I chose to cramp my body within buckskin and let my mind wander, to think and swear and live as I willed, and that is how I am here."

"And welcome you are!" exclaimed Michel. "Without your swinging musket there at the forks of the Chicagon we might have been dead men. We'll broach a keg to your health and the success of all of us."

"There appears to be much still to be explained," growled Basile. "An Englishman in New France smells to me too much of a spy."

"Listen further," replied Dick amiably, and answering the leader's hostile glance with a smile. "I was about to explain all."

He told of his boyhood, how he had acquired a desire for the forests rather than the settlements through his early association with the savages, of how he had gone north through the land of the Delawares, through the colony of the Dutch, the land of the Mohicans and finally to the St. Lawrence, where he had spent a Winter with a trader licensed by the French king. From tales he had heard there he had first become enamored of the life of the *coureurs de bois* in that great and little-known land to the westward on the shores of the five great lakes.

"And who was that trader?" asked Basile sharply, and with a cunning smile for Leon and Michel.

"His name was Simon Bouisson," answered Dick readily, "and he traded to the westward of Quebec."

"Simon Bouisson!" shouted Michel in glee. "And how, friend, did this Monsieur Bouisson appear?"

"I have never been in your Paris but I imagine that the gargoyles on one of the famous buildings are not at all unlike Simon," answered Dick.

Leon and Michel rolled upon the ground in the excess of their mirth and even Basile joined in the laughter.

"But," he said, "you have still to explain how you, from the colony of Virginia, could reach the southern shore of the Lake of the Islinois, or Lac Mecheygan, as some call it, when the land of the Longhouses lies directly between. The Iroquois are not in the habit of letting any one wander at will through their domain."

DICK began a complete account of his interview with Sir William Berkeley and his escape from the gaol. Michel and Leon broke in several times with their laughter and applause. But Basile, as Dick gained favor with the others, became more dour of expression.

Without a reference to Elizabeth Carver and her part in his escape, the young Virginian related how he had started northward to gain the Delawares' country, only to be driven in his canoe up the Potomac to escape a hostile band of Paspaheghs. He was pursued far and at last took to the woods in the Blue Mountains, to wander westward until he came to a river which he had seen before and which the savages called the Monongahela. The chance discovery of a canoe permitted him to descend this stream for a long distance without encountering any one.

As this route took him north and straight toward the Iroquois country, he began to have misgivings, when the stream was joined by another and the one current at last set off toward the southwest, a stream rapidly increasing in size and the most beautiful he had ever seen. When Dick described its lower reaches, and the savages from whom he escaped, Michel broke in with the explanation:

"That is the river the Iroquois call the Ohio, which means something like broad and beautiful. Farther west it is known to the savages as the Ouabashe. One of the king's men from Montreal, named La Salle, traveled on it a ways some seasons ago. Had you kept on, if the reports of the savages be true, you would have come to the great water, the one the savages to the west speak of as the Misisepe."

"And I would have been there long ere this had it not been for some red devils I encountered. They saw me and gave chase, and I turned into a big river that flowed in from the north and went up it for more than a hundred leagues. Then one night some knaves who, from the dress, or lack of it, must have been brothers to the Miamis who attacked us on the Chicagon, got between me and my canoe. I slipped away in the night, working north, for I knew the French were in that direction, and at last came out on what you have called Lac Mecheygan, only the day before I saw you. I believed it was the sea, until I tasted it."

"And now what?" asked Basile sharply.

"As you have seen and as you have heard," replied Dick with a smile. "I can not go back to the English colony. Death is certain there. Since I spent a year in New France I have wished to lead the life of the *coureurs de bois*. It appeals to me. Freedom of thought and action, of mind and body! No law, no rulers! Risks but no cares, a pleasant land and more pleasant companions! Why are you yourself a ranger of the forests, Monsieur Basile?"

"But I am French, in the land of the French."

Dick turned to the others with a smile.

"Does the king of France claim this land?" he asked. "Does he know it is here. I am sure that you have never taken reports to Montreal of what you know of it."

"Ha, ha, Basile!" cried Michel. "He scored there. We found this land beyond the Lac Mecheygan and we do not intend to give it to any king. Why should we run the risks for fat loafers in Europe? No! Monsieur Dick is right, and he is one of us. It makes no difference if he is English. He has the soul of the forest-rangers, and that is enough for us. Eh, Leon?"

"I care not if he be Dutch or Spanish after the way he charged the Miamis," agreed Leon. "We started with four. We will end with four. Let Monsieur Dick have Gabriel's share. He'll earn it before we are through."

Basile's face had become black as the others spoke, but before he could voice his protest Dick, who had been watching him closely, interrupted.

"I will not permit such generosity," he declared. "It is not right and I do not wish it. It is the life, not the profits, I crave. Only let me continue with you, sharing in the labor and the risks, and I am content. Then, the next year, perhaps."

"He is as fair and generous as he is brave!" cried Michel. "Come, Basile! Iron out your face. Monsieur Dick is to be one of us."

"One of us, always," agreed Leon.

The days went by, wonderful days for the Virginian. Never before had he seen so fair a country. The river flowed gently between prairie banks. Trees bordered the stream and wandered in patches and long lines out on to the plains. The sun shone brightly, inviting indolence. The breezes over the land were sweet and fresh.

Each day they dropped a little farther down the stream. Before long they entered a larger river, the river of the Islinois, Dick was informed, though none of the Frenchmen, and no white men before them, had ever been so far.

They feasted as they went. Wild turkeys were in the trees. Raspberries were ripe, and the three Frenchmen showed Dick how to dig and boil the prairie apple, which tasted to the Virginian much like the potato of the colonies. Deer grazed about them in herds. Fish of many kinds were plentiful in the water. They saw, too, for the first time, the pisikous, the *bœufs sauvage*, or wild cattle. Dick had never heard of these animals, though the other three had known of the huge beasts through savage reports, and their first encounter brought consternation to all four.

No longer than domestic cattle but twice the size, with great humps on their shoulders and massive heads in which beady eyes were set beneath black, curving horns and in the midst of a wealth of brown, curling hair, they roamed the plains in great herds. Their size, their numbers, and the ferocious appearance of the males, sent the four men in terror to their canoes when first encountered. Later Leon killed one and after they had tasted the tongue and the meat of the hump, and bands of the animals were seen every day, they were accepted as merely one of the bounties of this undreamed of land.

FROM the beginning Dick fell easily into the indolent, careless, untrammeled life of his companions. For hours each day, and always in the evening, they lay in the shade or beside a fire and told tales, experiences and adventures in far, strange places, among stranger people in wildernesses where no white men had ever been before. History has given to some men the distinction of being first in various places, but in the land of the Great Lakes and beyond, both to the west and north, the *coureurs de bois*, seeking adventure, freedom and opportunities for illicit trade with the Indians, far outstripped the emissaries of the king of France and the courageous Jesuits.

Dick caught at once the significance of these stories. It was well, among themselves, to tell of far places, but a whisper of them on the St. Lawrence meant prison and perhaps worse. He learned that Leon La Gard, with one companion, had penetrated the rich fur country to the north of Lac Superior, the greatest and the most distant of the great lakes; that Michel Charon had gone west from the same lake until he had passed the forest and come to a great plain; that Basile Pombert had gone south from Lac Mecheygan, past the Ouabashe, or the Ohio of the Iroquois, until he had found savages with muskets obtained from the Spaniards of La Floride.

"But this Red Sea, this Gulf of California, this land of gold and precious stones, have any of you seen it, or been near it?" asked Dick, his imagination inflamed by the stories.

"Who knows?" answered Leon with a shrug of his shoulders. "Perhaps this very river of the Islinois enters it. Perhaps tomorrow we will be floating upon salt water. Along the western shore of Lac Mecheygan, all along the shores of Lac Superior, always the savages speak of the Misisepe, the Michisepe, 'the great water,' as the Algonquin tongue expresses it, a land of strange people, of huge monsters and fiery demons.

"I have never known any who have been to it, though some have informed me that they have been told that its waters are salt. Once, south of Lac Superior, when among the Outaouacs and the Hurons, who were pursued there by the Iroquois, on a river they called Le Noir, or the Black, I was told that if I kept on down-stream I would come to the Misisepe. I would have gone, but it was late in the season."

"There is a 'blackrobe' even now at Michilimakinac called Marquette," said Michel, "who plans to go to this Misisepe. We stopped there on our way to the Chicagon River and he asked us many questions about where we had been and what we have heard of the place. He has an idea it is a river, from what he told us, and that it flows into the Gulf of California. Even now he awaits orders from his superior to go to look for the 'great water' next year, and he expects the governor of New France to send a man to accompany him. Then they'll claim it for the king."

"And you, who have been farther than the others, you and the other *coureurs de bois*, have you never claimed what you have found?" asked Dick. "From the Lac Mecheygan and Lac Superior westward, it is any man's land, any king's, open to the first who sees and claims it!"

"We claim it for our own, for what that claim be worth," answered Michel. "Why should we take it for a king? The king's men, and the king's laws, would come in and drive us out for our pains. There is enough land to the east for the fawners, for the men with king's licenses and favors, for the faint-hearts who dare not go beyond the sight of a plowed field or sound of church bells, for those who fear they might die unshriven. This land is for us who dare come to it, and it will remain ours if we can keep the 'blackrobes' and others back. This Marquette learned nothing from us that will be to his advantage, and if we can first see some of the savages on his route we may keep him out altogether.

"No, Monsieur Dick. Remember that you are to forget all that you see and hear. A discreet tongue is the sign of the *coureurs de bois*."

"He has already shown that his tongue is loose," interrupted Basile fiercely. "I have known from the first that there was no good in an Englishman coming into this land. An Englishman is too greedy to seek only adventure. His knees are too weak from bending to a throne to carry him so far into savage country merely to gain freedom. Leon! Michel! Did you not see his eyes gleam when he asked of the Red Sea and its gold and rubies? Did you not catch the tone of his voice when he wanted to know if this land of ours has been taken in the name of a king?

"I tell you, this Monsieur Dick is an English spy, a man who came into our country to take it for his own king. There was talk of it, and fear of it, when we were on the St. Lawrence this Spring. Now we know it."

As Basile spoke he had risen to his feet. His rage choked him toward the end and at last, his eyes gleaming evilly, he drew a knife and rushed at Dick, who still lay upon the ground.

Basile was thick, heavy, much older than the Virginian, and he had used a knife before. Despite his rage, his attack was not without planning. Dick, seeing him come, would attempt to rise to defend himself. In that defenseless position the knife would descend.

But Dick only pretended to rise. Instead he rolled into a ball and flung himself at Basile's feet. As the Frenchman sprawled headlong he himself sprang up and after him.

They had been lying at the edge of a bank six-feet high, a deep pool directly beneath them. Basile's fall had carried him close to the brink and Dick, with a push of his foot, sent him flying out into the water.

Leon and Michel had taken no part in the affair but now, as Dick stood there laughing at the antics of Basile as he rose to the surface, they suddenly sprang to their feet.

"The savages!" they cried in a low tone

together. "See! Over the river. The Islinois we have been seeking."

Dick looked across the stream. On the farther bank, standing in the shade of some willows, were two score or more of Indians.

CHAPTER V

THE ISLINOIS

LEON LA GARD ran at once to Dick's side.

"No more fighting," he whispered. "Pretend it was only merriment."

He bent over the bank, up which Basile Pombert, his knife still in his hand, was climbing to return to the attack.

"Fool!" Leon hissed. "Look across the river. We have reached the Islinois. They are watching us. Climb the bank and pretend you were only having sport with Monsieur Dick."

Basile turned and saw the Indians for the first time. Instantly his rage vanished and the angry glint in his eyes was succeeded by a covetous gleam that, to Dick, was even more sinister than the frank hatred to which he had become accustomed.

"Your hand, Dick!" he cried suddenly. "Help me up, and laugh, all of you. Michel! Come and join us! All of you! Clasp hands and circle 'round. They'll think it is a dance to end our sport."

Laughing uproariously, kicking their heels as they spun about, the four joined hands and whirled madly for a moment. Then they swung into line and faced the Indians across the stream.

"The calumet, Michel," whispered Basile, and Michel went to a pack and took out a long-stemmed pipe which he filled with tobacco.

"Now," directed Basile, "you and Dick get into a canoe and take it to their chief to smoke. Then bring him and one or two others back. Their tongue is much like that of the other savages we know and you can speak with them."

Michel directed Dick into the stern of the canoe and himself stood in the bow, bearing the pipe aloft. The Frenchmen seemed to have no fear whatever of this strange people who undoubtedly had never seen white men, and the Virginian, accepting their belief in the friendliness of the natives, paddled vigorously toward the opposite shore.

As they approached, Michel holding the mouth-piece of the pipe toward the savages, one of them detached himself from the group beneath the trees and stepped toward the bank. Straight, tall, naked except for a few ornaments, his brown skin gleaming in the sunshine, his face expressionless, the chief stood there in all the dignity with which the Indian was once able to enshroud himself.

The bow of the canoe touched the bank and Michel stepped out. With flint and steel he deftly lighted the tobacco in the stone bowl as the chief placed his lips to the mouth-piece and puffed. Michel smoked. Others came forward and the pipe went the rounds.

Not a word was spoken, not even a whisper was heard in the closely packed group of Indians. When Dick and Michel looked at them they seemed to be at ease, unconcerned, but their curiosity could not be entirely hidden and several times the Virginian, on turning quickly, surprised stares of amazement.

The ceremony of the pipe completed, Michel indicated to the leader that he was to enter the canoe and cross the river. He did so without hesitation and in a few minutes was being courteously welcomed by Basile and Leon.

It was with difficulty that Dick repressed his excitement. It had been his hope, upon leaving Virginia, that he could work north to the St. Lawrence and enter the fur trade. In time he hoped to become one of the *coureurs de bois*, to penetrate that amazing country to the west of which such strange stories were heard, to go on with some adventurous companions into new lands, among new people, to be the first somewhere.

Now, as a result of his misfortunes of the Spring and early Summer, he had been driven far to the west, only to encounter at once the very men he had sought and in the first weeks to be, with them, the first white men in a new wilderness, the first to see these nations that possessed a land so fertile and abundant in all that one could wish.

He looked forward eagerly to the outcome of the present ceremonies which, he knew, so delighted the savage heart, to the establishment of friendly relations with these people and the development of a prosperous trade. As for his trouble with Basile, he gave it little thought. He knew that the Frenchman, because of cleverness and love of power, had won to leadership over the careless, easy-going Leon and Michel. Dick himself had been a favorite with these two from the beginning and a certain aggressiveness and confidence had aroused in Basile the fear of a rival.

It was this that lay at the bottom of the Frenchman's charges of spying, that had prompted his attack that morning. Dick in no way feared Basile. Settlement of the question of supremacy between the two was inevitable and its hazards were part of the life he sought. If Basile, fired by hatred, could let the matter drop in the presence of the real business of the party, Dick could do as well. Accordingly he turned his whole attention to the ceremonies now being enacted.

First Basile made the chief a present of a steel knife, exhibiting its keenness and hardness. The savage's eyes glowed with pleasure and continually he tried the edge with his thumb, laughing outright when too much pressure caused a deep gash.

Then he was given a hatchet, the blade of which was as sharp as that of the knife. Basile, who had quickly taken note of the stone-tipped arrows, stone knives and horn-pronged war club of the chief, made the most of the superiority of the steel.

While the presents were being tested and admired Dick glanced across the river to discover that every savage had disappeared. As he searched the bank, expecting some ruse and realizing their helpless position should the Indians become hostile, he learned the reason. Down-stream and moving across the plain toward the river like a cloud shadow, only darker, and making a noise like distant thunder, was a great herd of *bœufs sauvage*.

"Basile!" cried Dick as he picked up his musket. "See. I'll now show them what powder can do!"

He leaped down the bank, pushed off the canoe and paddled quickly toward the approaching herd. In midstream he caught sight of some of the band hiding behind a fringe of willows at a point near which the buffalo would reach the river. He landed and joined them, his musket ready.

The Islinois, arrows ready, bows half-drawn, were intent upon the game until the white man strode in among them. At first his coming caused some resentment but Dick's confident, expectant attitude, his calm assurance and manner of holding what they knew must be some sort of weapon, aroused curiosity, almost forgetfulness of the game. They gathered near him, looked at his hair, his skin, his eyes and, not without amusement, at his weapon, if weapon it could be. Then one of them gave a low hiss and all turned to see the edge of the herd sweeping close to the shelter.

Immediately Dick stepped out. Not an Indian followed, nor was an arrow loosened. All gazed in wonder at this hunter who so exposed himself, who stood as if looking at the game in idle curiosity. As they watched, the Virginian suddenly lifted the musket to his shoulder. A roar followed. Smoke rolled forth in a cloud. When it lifted a monster bull lay on the ground, kicking in his death agony.

With a bow to the hunters and a magnanimous wave of his hand toward the quarry, Dick walked back toward his canoe and paddled across the stream.

"Bravo!" cried Michel as he landed. "A master stroke, Monsieur Dick! We could see you plainly and you should have been here to watch the chief's face. He had no more than grasped what you had done than we presented him with a musket and he has invited us down to the village. It's only two leagues down the stream and we start at once. *Mon Dieu!* What a haul we will make. We haven't broached a cask. And when we do!"

Trying vainly to repress his emotions, the Frenchman danced gaily back to his companions beside the chief. That worthy arose as Dick approached and held out his hand. He spoke a few words, most of which Dick grasped because of their similarity to other Algonquin tongues.

"Come boys," commanded Basile. "Two of you take the chief across now so that he can talk with his men. Then bring him back and we'll take him to the village in one of the canoes. These people never use boats and it will please him to ride upon the water."

Dick and Michel paddled the chief across the river where his men crowded about him in an excited, jabbering group, each trying to be first to handle the mysterious weapon their leader so proudly displayed. He issued a few brief directions and then returned.

Back at their camp the four white men loaded their canoes rapidly and then, the chief reposing in state in the center of the craft paddled by Basile and Leon, they turned down-river, accompanied by the shouting, excited savages on shore.

IN LITTLE more than an hour the village, strung along the right bank of the river, was reached. The noisy escort had announced their coming long before and the shore was crowded with women, children and old men.

"That's good," Michel whispered to Dick with quick relief when he saw the small number of *cabines*. "The forty hunters are all the men of the village, which means there won't be too many to handle."

"You don't expect trouble surely after the friendly manner in which they received us, do you?" asked the Virginian.

"There is always trouble when a savage and brandy get together. I have heard that there are more than a hundred thousand of these people, who are the richest and most powerful of any nation the French have met, excepting always the Longhouses. They grow big fields of corn and roots and melons and squashes, there is game enough for four times as many on these plains, and it is said that they never know what famine is, as is so often the case with the nations to the north. These people sow their crops and then go out for game, come home and harvest what they have planted, and then they go for the big Winter hunt. That is what the other savages have said of them, and it is known that they always live in plenty."

The canoes were landed and when Dick climbed the bank he saw that Michel had not stretched the truth. Compared with the northern Indians, especially those in the country beyond the St. Lawrence, these were indeed a pleasant people in a land more pleasant than he had ever dreamed of. As he passed through the throng he was impressed by the courtesy of their manner, their happiness and contentment as expressed in sleek bodies and smiling faces. Old and young, they seemed like happy, frolicking children, sincere in their welcome to the white strangers.

Dick, in his attitude toward life, was little more than a child himself and, not only because he knew that a quick way to an Indian's heart is through his child, but because this scene of contentment had captivated his spirit, he picked up a naked little boy and tossed him into the air again and again. At first the child was frightened, but against Dick's infectious smile its terror was powerless, and when at last he swung the youngster to his shoulder and strode off through the village the child fastened his fingers in his hair and chattered with delight.

"Here," growled Basile as Dick returned to the shore. "We'd not have a thread of anything left if we all ran off and left these savages to do as they wished with the canoes. You and Michel stay here and guard them while Léon and I have a talk with the chief. We must see what they have to trade before we go further."

Dick set the child down and joined Michel.

"You have a gay heart," said the *coureur de bois*, "but there is always a time in life when one must be serious, and we have reached it now. The chief desires to send off runners to inform another village down-river of our arrival, but we don't want any more than we have here, and not these unless it be worth our while."

Dick did not reply. It was not this unusual seriousness of the ordinarily carefree Michel that silenced him but something sinister in the cold, calculating methods of the Frenchmen. To the Virginian trade with the savages meant an exchange of goods for fur and food. If these Indians did not have much they could trade for what there was and go on to the next village. Why need fear greater numbers of such friendly, happy, contented people?

He reviewed these amazing plans and actions as he sat on the bow of the canoe but the memory of his happy hours with Michel and Leon forced him to the conclusion that Basile, with his scheming, his evil mind, alone was at the bottom of any possible knavery. The other two, indolent, lighthearted, unaspiring, were merely tools in the older man's hands.

For the first time since he had joined them Dick entertained a serious thought, and it was in the resolution that he would give Basile cause for his jealousy, that he would wrest the leadership from this villainous Frenchman.

As he came to this decision Leon ran down to the canoes.

"It's good news," he cried. "They have a wealth of beaver skins and many of smaller animals, besides dozens of fine specimens of the robes of the *bœufs sauvage.*

Basile has dissuaded the chief from summoning the next village and we are to begin trading at once. Out with the bales, boys, all but the casks. They'll wait until tonight."

The three began to unload the canoes. Basile and the chief soon joined them and the goods were arranged on the bank. More presents were made to the leading men of the village and then the trading began.

At first Dick was inclined to be a little ashamed of the values given and received but he forgot it in the expression of happiness upon the faces of the savages and in the reflection that the Frenchmen had brought the goods safely through more than six hundred leagues of wilderness.

He and Michel were set to work baling the furs received and for the remainder of the day he had little time for anything else. At sunset the goods were exhausted and the Indians still had many furs. Basile looked at the others and Leon and Michel nodded. A cask was immediately brought from the canoes and broached. Basile let a little into a gourd and passed it to the chief, explaining that it was the strong water of the French of which he undoubtedly had heard from other savages, that it made the sun shine and the rain cease, the heart gay and the feet light.

The chief took a swallow and then clutched his throat in sudden fear as the potent liquor scorched and choked him. Then, as it reached his stomach and warmed it, he patted his abdomen and a smile spread over his face.

Again Basile held the gourd toward him and again the chief drank, this time greedily, despite the burning sensation in his throat. The remainder was offered to one of the warriors who downed it at a gulp and then grinned sheepishly when the others laughed at the distortions of his face.

Basile, who evidently had quickly perfected himself in the slight change to the Islinois tongue, now spoke to the chief at some length. The leader, who was most evidently feeling the effects of the brandy, listened for a moment, caught the meaning of what the Frenchman was saying, and then turned to his people, to whom he talked rapidly.

Immediately there was a scramble of men hurrying to the cabins. Dick, who, because he was busy, and because of his unfamiliarity with this new branch of the Algonquin tongue, had not understood the exact meaning of all that was said, was amazed to see them come running back, their hands full of bows, arrows, spears, war clubs, stone knives and weapons of every conceivable sort. Basile in the meantime had unloaded the casks and the savages dumped the village arsenal into the two canoes.

"Why are we doing this?" demanded Dick when he and Michel, at Basile's command, had paddled the two canoes across the river and emptied their contents upon the opposite shore.

"To save our own precious heads from being split open tonight," was the laughing reply. "Such a sight as you shall see, Dick, and such a haul as we shall make!"

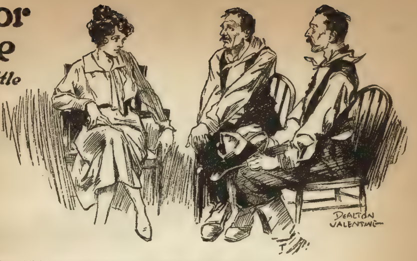
"But why should we not leave the weapons in the canoes?" asked the Virginian, who now understood that more brandy was to be given to the savages but that the Frenchmen, fearing violence from the liquor-aroused natives, had made this arrangement for their own protection.

"Because we'll need the canoe, my friend," was the reply, "and see that you do not take too much of the brandy yourself. We will need good heads and nerves, and stout arms, too, for there will be leagues and leagues of paddling before we sleep again."

TO BE CONTINUED

Loco or Love

by W. C. Tuttle



Author of "A Prevaricated Parade," "Dough or Dynamite," etc,

"IF YOU'D 'a' cooked them two eggs at the same time, 'Magpie,' mine wouldn't 'a' rolled off on the floor and busted," says I, sad-like, looking at the remains.

Magpie Simpkins rises his full height, which is some elevation, and glares at me.

"Ike Harper," says he, "tend to your own cooking. A person what is as ungrateful as you are can't partake of my cooking, neither will I break bread with such as he."

I got my boots on, cooks me some bacon, and eats as far from that hombre as the room allows. A house divided can't ring with harmony, and love has put a breach as wide as the Grand Cañon between me and Magpie. The little feller with the bow and arrer has rasped us raw.

Magpie is the sheriff of our county, and I'm his deputy. Me and that scantling-shaped hombre have been pardners ever since gold was discovered on bedrock, and this is the first rift in our lute. Of course there has been discords, but this is the first time that the strings have all been busted!

Love cometh at strange times. Me and Magpie have been over in the Medicine Hills, sort of looking for an alleged rustler, and are coming out, when we sees a nester's cabin with smoke coming out of the stove-pipe. It's an old place, and ain't been occupied for some time, so we decides to investigate.

We're a heap hungry, and when we gets in shooting range we smells fried onions and coffee. There's an aroma of biscuits on the air, too, which don't hurt our noses none.

We pilgrims into the yard, and as we slips off our broncs the door opens, and we sees our heart's desire. She's a cute little filly. She's slender, got a lot of eighteen-carat hair, and blue eyes as big as the end of a shotgun shell.

She's got a bowl full of dough in her hands, and she stares at us like we're curiosities. Sudden-like she smiles.

"I'm Sheriff Simpkins," states Magpie, removing his hat.

She gives a queer little squeak and drops her bowl on the ground.

"I ain't done nothing!" says she, sort of vacant-like.

"Ma'am, the queen can do no wrong," states Magpie. "We smells the odors of Araby, so our noses brings us hither."

"Onions," says she. "Don't they smell."

"Perfume of the gods," says I. "I'd wear one all the time if it wasn't for the looks of the thing. I'm your obedient servant, Ike Harper. You living here alone?"

"Yes," she nods. "A poor, defenseless woman. I hope there ain't no objection to me using this cabin. I'll take care of it."

"She's yours," pronounces Magpie. "If anybody interferes with your habitation you send for me."

"And in case he's too busy I'll come," says I. "He's a busy man. I'm sorry he was so quick to startle yuh, and make yuh bust your dough mug. He's abrupt thataway."

"No matter," says she. "Won't yuh come in?"

Just wouldn't we? Say! Them onions was the greatest and the biscuits was the lightest yuh ever seen. Coffee? Nectar of the gods. There ain't much furniture in the place, but what is in there looks homelike. She's got a enlarged picture on the wall, the same of which seems familiar.

"Ma'am," says Magpie, pointing at it," "would yuh mind telling me who the distinguished-looking gent is?"

"Was," says she, sad-like. "He's gone and——"

"Magpie," says I, "don't presume on short acquaintance to stir up sad memories. There don't seem to be nothing sacred to him, ma'am."

She smiles at us, sweet-like, and nods:

"Yes, he's gone, but his memory lingers. He was a good man."

"You dang well know he was," agrees Magpie. "If he wasn't his picture wouldn't be on your walls. What did you say your name was?"

"I didn't say, Mister Simpkins: I am Lily Lester."

"Some pretty name. Call me Magpie—pleased to meet yuh."

"I might not decipher the call if yuh said Mister Harper," says I. "Maw used to call me Honey, but Ike suits me fine."

"Honey!" snorts Magpie. "Not combhoney, Ike. You ain't used——"

"Personalities are bad form, Magpie," I reminds him. "Remember we're before a lady. Ma'am, I'd love to drop in once in a while and see how you're making it."

"Do it," says she. "I'd love to have yuh."

"Yes'm," says Magpie. "I will."

She thanks us—I don't know what for—and we rides away. We pilgrims off across the hills towards Piperock, and we takes looks at that cabin until we're out of sight.

"Ike, Lily is a lulu," states Magpie.

"If that's an expression of admiration I remains torpid, but if that apellation of lulu reflects on the lady in any way I resents it a heap."

"Get a dictionary, Ike," he grins. "Lulu is a Latin word meaning 'wonderful.' Ain't she a wonder? Biscuits! Onions! Ike, I wish you'd ask her for her recipe for cooking coffee. I sure admire coffee that I don't have to chew and what won't corrode my insides at each meal. I wonder if she contemplates future matrimony? She don't need to live alone, Ike. Reckon I ain't beyond matrimonial redemption myself. What do yuh think?"

"If yuh don't like the way I cook coffee, Magpie, you can cook it yourself. And as far as matrimony and you are concerned, you'd be like a three-legged turtle trying to catch a scared wolf. There ain't nothing about you to catch the female fancy.

"In the first place, you're too long. No woman wants to look up a lodge-pole all her life. An occasional glance at your face ain't going to hurt nobody, but as a steady diet—no!"

"Faces," he states, "ain't so much. Brains and companionship counts a heap more. You suffers a heap that-away, Ike. You're pretty in the face—like a buffalo, and about as companionable as a porkypine, but when it comes to brains you ain't got a trump. I'll likely ride her way very soon."

"Me, too. Likely tomorrow."

"Yes, and likely yuh won't, Ike!" he snorts. "You're working for me. Sabe? You goes where I sends yuh."

"If you think for a holy minute that I ain't going to have no leisure time, Magpie, you think again. You get too cocky, old-timer, and I'll quit or take a vacation. Sabe?"

"Don't fly off the handle, Ike," he advises. "Nobody ever said yuh couldn't have no leisure time. You hops off half-cocked. Also you're contrary. Did yuh ever hear about the dog what got in the manger? He couldn't eat the hay, and he wouldn't let the bronc eat it."

"If you figures yourself as the bronc in that moral, Magpie, you lose. Your ears are too long, old-timer. Where do yuh get the idea that I can't get the lady? I made a living before I met you. The only thing I ever done that I was ashamed of was the day I pinned your star on my bosom. You thinks just because you're a sheriff you're better than most folks. You didn't grab any honors when you beat 'Shep' Allen for sheriff. He's blind in one eye and string-halted in both legs. Just let me whisper something to you, Magpie: if you don't grab some of these cow thieves——"

"Ike, you can desist. I'm doing all that a mortal man can do. If I had a deputy that was worth a cuss I'd——"

THAT'S a sample of our conversation on the way home. Being pardners for so long, we hates to say hateful things to each other, but in a case like this the truth does seep out. We gets real personal before we gets to Piperock, and finds Zeb Abernathy and "Scenery" Sims setting in front of our office, waiting for us.

Zeb looks just like you'd bet he would after hearing his name, but no name on earth could give an impression of Scenery. When I look at him I think thusly:

"The person what built you, Scenery, must 'a' run mighty short of material. They looks yuh over and says—'It ain't much of a man, but I'll put a squeak in it so growed-up folks won't step on it accidental-like.'"

They looks up at us as we rides in. Zeb almost unjoins his neck trying to expectorate across the street, crosses his legs and squints—

"Any news, Magpie?"

"Hello, Zeb," says Magpie. "Nothing new. Heard anything?"

"Bank got robbed today," squeaks Scenery. "Dog-gone thing got absolutely robbed. I been telling everybody that we ain't got no protection around here. Whole sheriff's office couldn't find a ace in a new pack of cards. Ain't yuh going to do nothing?"

"I know something I'd like to do," states Magpie, looking down at Scenery. "You keep your squeak in your chest and let Zeb tells us about it. What happened, Zeb?"

"While you fellers are picking flowers over in the hills a feller rides into town, throws down on the cashier with a gun and lopes off with the treasure. He told the cashier to give you his regards. What yuh going to do, Magpie?"

"Cry a little," says Magpie, tired-like. "I don't reckon there is much else to do. Some of you folks gets the idea that just because I wears a star all I got to do is yell, 'Come here, ye outlaws!' and they'll come a-running."

"What I want to know is what are yuh going to do?" squeaks Scenery. "When we elects yuh sheriff——"

"They," corrects Magpie. "You voted for Allen, Scenery."

"Then I got something to be proud of. I'm glad that folks can't hold me responsible for you."

Him and Zeb ambles off up-town, and we goes inside.

"There ain't no joy in being a sheriff!" yelps Magpie, throwing his boots over in the corner. "Your duty sort of keeps yuh from pulling a gun and acting free-like. I'm going out tomorrow and get that bad, bad-man, Ike. You watch me."

The next morning he shaves careful-like, and greases his boots.

"Going to try and make a mash on him?" I asks. "You ought to have some perfume, Magpie. You look like a bridegroom."

"Ike," says he, ignoring the compliment, "I wants you to ride up to Sullivan Gulch, and see if anybody's living there. We got to locate something or somebody pretty soon."

"Where you going?" I asks.

"Into the breaks between here and the Circle-Cross."

I rides out of Piperock with joy in my heart, 'cause I'm going in the general direction of my heart's desire, and Magpie has gone the opposite. What do I care for outlaws? Duty to me is self-preservation.

Me and Magpie meets at the door. We nods like distant relatives, and each knocks on our side of the door. The lady makes us welcome, and we sets down.

"I'm so glad to see yuh," says she, and Magpie walks plumb across the room to shake hands with her.

"I wish I'd 'a' known yuh was coming today," she states. "I'd 'a' had yuh bring me some stuff from town."

"Well, ma'am," says Magpie, "if there's anything yuh want I can send Ike after it. What's the use of having hired men if yuh don't use 'em. Tell me what your heart desires."

"I ain't got no time," says I, "I'm headed for Sullivan Gulch. I'd love to do it, ma'am, but I'm rushed. Magpie's just loafing, so he'll be glad to do it."

Magpie glares at me and I glares right back at him.

"How lovely," coos this here lady. "It will be lovely."

"We'll both go, Ike," states Magpie. "I got a little job of work in Piperock that you can attend to while I'm bringing the stuff back. Write out your list, ma'am, and I'll deliver it right to your door."

Me and Magpie pilgrims back to Piperock in silence, buys the stuff for the lady, and goes down to the office.

We finds Buck Masterson on the steps.

"Howdy, Buck," says Magpie. "What can I do for yuh?"

"Well, unless you improves your ways I don't reckon yuh can do anything," says Buck, sort of helpless-like. "I been robbed!"

"*Pshaw!*" says I. "How comes that, Buck?"

"Feller—same one what robbed the bank, I reckon—comes into my saloon this morning, sticks a gun in my face and annexes what I got in the safe. Said he knowed the sheriff was away. Say, Magpie, what in —— are you doing? Sending out proclamations of your absence?"

I don't care to listen to no such conversation, so I goes inside, and pretty soon Magpie and Buck pilgrims up-town. I takes that stuff, throws it on a hoss, and points for the lady of my dreams.

I GETS almost to her place, when Magpie overtakes me. We rides up, deposits the stuff and partakes of a light lunch.

"I'm a outlaw-hunter," states Magpie, during the meal. "It's a precarious existence, fraught with much danger, and takes a man of nerve."

"Romantic," says she. "And what does Mister Harper do?"

"He holds my bronc."

"While you runs," says I. "Magpie don't want to be bothered with no bronc when he gets scared, ma'am. If I was the sheriff of this county I'd keep her swept clean of outlaws, believe me. It irks me some to take orders when I know they ain't getting us no place."

"Do you suppose I'm in any danger living here alone?" she asks.

"If I thought you was I couldn't sleep," orates Magpie. "You need the protection of a man. If you——"

"You hadn't ought to be here alone," I states. "Of course I'd love to stay here with you, but—there's a preacher in Piperock, ma'am."

"Preachers ain't no protection," states Magpie. "Being sort of a legal guardian of this here county, I'd admire to——"

"Magpie, you ain't got no time," I reminds him. "You got to investigate that bank robbery and the one in Buck's place. You've said yourself that I ain't no help to you. Why don't yuh appoint me to look fater the weaker sex in this county?"

"Ike, after knowing you as long as I have, I'd hate to call 'em the weaker sex."

'Oh, I'm not afraid," she states. "As long as I've got two big strong men looking after me I feel safe. I do hope you can come often. Can't you come tomorrow?"

"I can," says Magpie. "Of course Ike will have to stay and tend to the office routine work. It ain't much but it's got to be done."

"Routine work," says I to Magpie, as we pilgrims back. "What routine, Magpie?"

"Seeing that nobody breaks into jail without showing a warrant," he grins. Pretty soon he heaves a long sigh, and turns in his saddle—"Ike, it ain't going to be long before you'll be cooking grub for yourself alone."

"It sure ain't," I agrees. "I begins tonight. Your feller-feelings are paralyzed, Magpie Simpkins, and no more do I cook for an ungrateful hombre like you. Dang your slim soul! You ain't noways good enough for that lady."

"Ain't it true," he agrees. "But I'm getting better all the time, Ike. Didn't yuh notice how the tears comes to her eyes, and how her breast heaved when I spoke about losing sleep? And then you—dang yuh! You has to cut in with that sky-pilot talk when I'm getting right down to business. If I had five minutes alone with her I'd have her hand."

"I'll bet yuh would," I agrees. "A feller what can lie as fast as you can hadn't ought to take that long."

"You're one of the kind what makes love by main strength and awkwardness, Ike. Your idea of a courtship is to take a damsel by the hair, drag her home, slam her into a corner, and then hammer her with a boot if she can't cook. You say I'd lie to her. You got to, Ike. No woman was ever told the truth when she was proposed to. She don't want the truth."

"I never beat up no woman, Magpie," I advises him. "Also I ain't no second George Washington."

That night we cooks separate meals, and I got all the best of it, 'cause Magpie can't cook. The next morning he beats me to it. We've only got two eggs left, and of course he has to let mine roll off on the floor. Now we're back where this tale began, with him orating about breaking bread with me.

"Old trailer," says I, "if you baked the bread, we couldn't break it."

He don't reply—just snorts, so we eats on opposite sides of the shack.

Some of Piperock's prominent citizens come down to see Magpie, and their conversation leads us to believe that we're incompetent. They hints around that they might 'a' made a mistake when they elects Magpie. Magpie sighs deep-like, and tells them to not take snap judgment, 'cause he's going out to get that feller right soon. Art Miller gets Magpie off to one side and speaks to him in whispers. Magpie shakes his head, emphatic-like, and Art acts disgusted. After they're gone I asks Magpie what Art wanted.

"He's timid. Got some gold going out on the stage today and says he hates to take a chance. Said it was my duty to see that he got through safe-like. Safe ——!"

"He's right," says I. "It's your duty, Magpie. I'll go up and see if the lady needs anything. You can't shirk all your responsibility."

Magpie smokes a while and nods:

"I reckon you're right, Ike. The office has to protect them what needs it, so I'll send you. I was thinking of the pleasant time you and me was going to have up at that little cabin today, but since your oration about duty I reckon we'll have to help Art out. You just tell him I sent you for a guard. Who yuh writing to, Ike?"

"You," says I, looking up from my labor. "This is my resignation, Magpie."

"Coward!" says he, soft-like.

The Harper tribe are a peacefully inclined lot of human beings, and forgiving to a startling degree, but that word means fight. I hits him in the neck with the ink-bottle, and then we tangles.

When we gets through I'm on the floor with the stove in my lap, while Magpie sets half-way out of the door with a chair hung around his neck. Just then Scenery Sims sticks his head in the window, and yelps:

"What's this? What's this?"

I takes one of the legs off that stove, and bounces it off his head and yells:

"A draw! You squeaky fool!"

We hears his boots just hitting the ground at intervals of three seconds, as he labors back up-town.

Magpie wipes some of the blood and ink off his forehead, and glares at me.

"You're too danged touchy!" he wails. "We sure do look like making social calls, now don't we?"

"I wouldn't face her for a million," says he.

"Neither would I," says I.

I cleans my face the best I can, and walks over to the door. I takes off my star and tosses it on the table.

"Magpie," says I, "I'm all through. No more will I chase the festive outlaw. From now on I'm going to be a common citizen, and entitled to come down here and raise thunder with you for not tending to your duty. I'm wise to you, old-timer. Being a ordinary citizen and entitled to protection I hereby audibly objects to you frittering the county's time away making love. Remember, Magpie, I knows your secret. Sabe?"

I goes over to the barn and saddles up. I ain't in no shape to fawn over a lady, but the call of love is strong upon me and I unconsciously rides in her direction. I forgets time and distance, and all of a sudden I'm at her door and she's smiling at me."

"Ma'am," says I, "I know I looks repulsive, but my heart is in the right place. I been in a awful fight, and when a man's wounded he flies away to where his heart is."

"Where is the sheriff?" she asks.

The question hurts, but I conceals my grief.

"Why worry about that sandhill crane?" I replies. "I reckon he's forgot yuh already, ma'am. I quit him today, and I'm glad of it. I'm of age and fancy free, ma'am. I know I ain't much to look at. I'm a regular old pelican, and I ain't so pure as snow, but I'm getting better—thank yuh. When a woman comes into a man's life it sure cleans house with him. The minute I sees your face I says to myself: 'There she is, Ike. There's the one woman——' "

WE HEARS the rattle of a bronc's hoofs and then—

"Whoa!"

I hops to the window and sees Magpie Simpkins, and then I ducks and yelps:

"Where can I hide? I don't want to see him."

"Under the bed," she whispers. "Hurry!"

I skids under the bunk. The blanket hangs almost to the floor, and hides me fine. She opens the door and lets Magpie in.

"Ma'am," says he, "I'm sorry to come to see yuh looking like this, but I promised yuh I'd come, and I'd 'a' done it if it took my last drop of blood. I had a awful fight with a outlaw. All I had was my bare hands and ability against his modern weapons, and of course I didn't come through unscathed."

"And the outlaw?" she asks, interested-like. "What of him?"

"Ma'am," Magpie replies, weary-like, "he crawled away to die. Like a animile wounded unto death he crawled out of mortal sight to cash his chips."

I hears Magpie sigh deep-like again, and then continues:

"Ma'am, I'm—a—a common old coot. I've lived alone so long that I can't seem to release the words that clamors in my bosom to be spoke. Until I seen your face I ain't given a thought to a double rig. I'm pure in mind and of a forgiving nature. I asks yuh—please don't smile, ma'am. This is a serious chore with me. I come here for succor——"

"A, Magpie," I corrects him, aloud. "A sucker."

There is silence for some time. I hears Magpie's boots scrape nervous-like on the floor, and he clears his dry throat.

"Did—did you hear somebody speak?" he asks.

She must 'a' shook her head, 'cause he shuffles his feet again and says:

"Reckon I'm getting jumpy. Well, ma'am, what do yuh think of the proposition?"

"Where is Mister Harper today?" she asks, ignoring his question.

I peeks out from under the bed and I sees Magpie's feet real close to me. There's a piece of rope laying between his heels and the chair leg. Magpie is scared of snakes, and it gives me an idea.

"Ma'am," says he, "let's not speak of that person. He done me dirt. Just when I needs him bad he up and quits me. For why? Because he's scared. That feller ain't got no nerve a-tall. So long as he can lay around and do nothing but wear a star he's a hy-iu officer, but the minute he sees a little trouble showing up he quits cold. I hates a coward, ma'am. No man can ever say that a Simpkins flinched when danger came his——"

"*Z-z-z-z-z-z-z!*" says I, and begins drawing that rope past his heels.

He freezes to his chair for about three seconds, and then just hits the floor once before he exits through the door. I rolls out the side of the bed, slips the window open and drops out of the back of the cabin. I gets a glimpse of the lady's face as I slides over the sill, and she's got tears running down her face.

I figured that this here ain't the proper time for me to make marriage proposals to the lady, and after taking one good look at her face, as I flopped over the window sill, I don't figure that Magpie will stand much show of getting her to sign up for life.

My bronc has drifted around to the back, which is the reason Magpie never saw it, so I leads it away from there and laughs all the way home.

I rides up to Buck Masterson's saloon, and meets Pete Gonyer and a stranger. They immediate and soon surrounds me.

"Ike, this is Mister Brand," states Pete, and I shakes the hand of this stranger person. "Mister Brand would talk with somebody from the sheriff's office, Ike, so I turns him loose on you."

Pete wanders away and me and Mister Brand sets down on the sidewalk. He pulls out a couple of photygrafts and hands 'em to me.

"Look at them and see if yuh recognize either one," says he.

There's something familiar about one of them but the other one is a complete stranger. I can't place the other one, but there's a trace some place.

"That's 'Kid' Corey," says he. "This other one is 'Blazer' Bailey. They're a clever pair. Artists in the hold-up line. I'm a Federal officer. They been grabbing off a lot of registered mail lately, and the last stunt they pulls off was over on the main line. The Kid got hit, but somehow they both got away and headed across the divide in this direction. You been having so much trouble over here that I decides to look into it. It may not be them—don't look like their work, 'cause your cases have all been one man.

"Blazer is a big husky, but Corey wouldn't cause yuh to look twice. He used to be a sort of a actor, I believe."

"Well, I can't help yuh much," says I. "Yuh see I ain't connected with the sheriff's office no more. Maybe the sheriff can give yuh some information, but I doubt it. I know everything he does and all that I naturally knows myself, but I can't help yuh none."

"I've heard some uncomplimentary things about the office," he admits. "Folks around here seems to bare their feelings. Much obliged anyway, Mister Harper."

I goes down to the office to get my effects, when Magpie comes in. He sets down and pretends to read a paper.

"Where yuh been?" I asks.

He yawns and folds up the paper.

"Hunting around a little."

I sets down on the table and rolls a smoke.

"Magpie," says I, "what do yuh know about snakes?"

He drops the paper and sets up straight in his chair. He's got sort of a foolish look about his face, and he sort of gawps at me:

"Uh-uh—snakes? I—I don't sabe, Ike?"

"I didn't think yuh did. A man's a sucker to ask questions of folks he knows can't answer 'em."

He uncoils from his chair, slides his gun around to the front and faces me.

"Ike, I got a question to ask you. Were you——"

Just then the door bangs open, and in comes Art Miller, all out of wind. He flops in a chair and pants:

"I—I told yuh! The—uh—uh—stage was huh-held up. About fuf-five miles down the road. Took all I had—dang the luck!"

"Mail, too?" I asks, and he nods. "Everything, I told yuh!"

"Well, well!" says I. "That must 'a' been Kid Corey or Blazer Bailey. Worthy of your steel, Magpie."

"Well, ain't yuh going to move?" yelps Art. "Going to let 'em get plumb away as usual?"

"Which way did they go?"

"Towards Paradise. Yuh never can tell which way he went after he got out of sight."

"Any danged fool knows that," agrees Magpie. "I reckon I better go after him."

"I reckon yuh better had," pants Art, and then lopes back up-town.

Magpie fusses around getting ready, oiling his guns and fixing a cinch on his saddle.

"You sure do go right after 'em, Magpie," says I. "You ought to be called 'Sudden' Simpkins. Don't let me hurry yuh. I'll go away so yuh can oil your boots and shave. Haste makes waste, Magpie."

I GOES up-town, and she's boiling. They're organizing a posse to work independent of the sheriff's office, but I don't join. I got sweeter things to think of than killing or incarcerating my feller men. The little feller without no pants on, carrying a bow and arrer seems to beckon me.

I forks my bronc and rides north, lingering along, building air-castles and so forth. My bronc ain't none too energetic, and we consumes plenty of time.

I dips into a cañon and rides up a cow trail, when a man with a pack-animile cuts my path, and I recognizes Magpie Simpkins. I keeps behind him, and pretty soon he gets off his bronc and seems to be picking up something off the ground. I rides up slow behind him, and rolls a smoke. The son-of-a-gun is so busy he don't hear me until I clears my throat and then he whirls around with his hands full of flowers.

We looks at each other for half a minute, and then he grins, sort of foolish-like and holds out his hands:

"Daisies," says he. "Daisies."

"Not today, little girl," says I. "I ain't got no water to put 'em in."

"Dang fool," he snorts.

"That's what I thought when I rode up," I agrees. "From the looks of your pack I'd say you was on a protracted trip. I thought Art said the robber went south."

"Uh-huh," he nods, smelling his bouquet. "I got to deliver this load before I'm free to hunt outlaws, Ike."

"For her?" I asks, and he nods.

"She's paying for it, ain't she?"

"Do you think I'd let her?" he snaps. "A feller's got to do something for his sweetheart, ain't he? I paid for that other load, too."

"I'm going down and kill that storekeeper," says I. "I did, too."

"Haw!" says Magpie, when I begins to laugh.

He hauls out a roll of bills, and spits on his thumb.

"How much did yuh pay, Mister Harper?"

"Seventeen-fifty," says I, and he counts it out and hands it to me. "That squares it. I don't want her under obligations to no other man. Sabe?"

"You think for a minute that you can buy me off?" says I. "You think my heart's love is for sale—for seventeen-fifty? When did you get a mortgage on the lady, Mister Simpkins?"

"We've come to an understanding," he states. "She accepts my protection, exclusive. Well, I must be going on. Adios."

He moves on and I rides with him. It sort of irritates him, and he swings around in his saddle.

"Harper," says he—that's the first time he ever called me just Harper—"Harper, you've heard that old saying, 'Three is a crowd? Well, I don't like crowds. Sabe?"

"The back-trail is open," says I. "You can't give me orders."

"Dang you, Ike!" he wails. "Ain't you got no finer feelings?"

"Not since I lived with you, Magpie. You'd blunt a piledriver."

We sets there and glares at each other for a spell. I rolls a smoke, and he follers suit.

"No bowels of compassion?" he asks, sadlike.

"Not a gut."

"Ike," says he, after a while, "will you do me a favor? Just for old times' sake, Ike?"

"Shoot," says I.

"Well, Ike, I—I—I sort of got—well, she's beginning to see things my way, and all I asks is ten minutes alone with her. You stay away for ten minutes after I goes inside, and then you can come in and congratulate the happy couple. Will yuh do it, Ike?"

"That's a mighty big favor, Magpie," I observes after sufficient thought. "You and me been more or less friendly for years and years, Magpie, and—well, I'll do it. I'll give yuh ten minutes start of me. Cut your wolf loose and go a-howling."

"Ike," says he, with tears in his voice, "you'll never regret it. As soon as we're married I'll have you up to supper."

"If you can propose in ten minutes, Magpie, I'll cook for you all the rest of your life for nothing. Propose in ten minutes! Why, you can't spit inside of fifteen. Go ahead and have it over with."

We pilgrims on until we tops a hill above her cabin. I stops there and lets Magpie go on down. I'm to stick there until I figures that I can make the cabin ten minutes after he goes inside.

I rolls a smoke and watches him take his animile around to the back, and then open the door and walk right inside.

"Getting danged familiar," says I to my bronc. "Going in without knocking."

I'm glancing around the landscape, when I sees two men on hosses cut across behind me not a quarter of a mile away. Suddenlike I sees some more off to my left. They're acting queer, so I spurs my bronc for a better place to see.

Zow-w-w-w. Flup-p-p-p.

A bullet goes past my ear, and another sticks into the ground a few feet short and fills my bronc's eyes full of sand.

"Bronc," says I, "somebody desires our de-mise. Let's away."

I sticks the spurs in his ribs, and races down the hill. That cabin is the best cover in sight and, while I may be a little ahead of time, I feels that Magpie will forgive me.

I hits that door just ahead of a handful of lead and sort of busts up the courtship. The lady looks sort of sick, and when I busts in Magpie pulls his guns.

"Everybody get down low!" I yelps.

"Who and what is it, Ike?" asks Magpie, ducking when a bullet dusts some of the mud from between the logs near his face.

"Danged if I know! They smokes me up and chases me here."

"Save me!" yelps the lady, sprawling on the bunk. "I'm sick as ——!"

Such language makes me glance up, but I glues my eyes back to that crack again, where I got some chinking pushed out. I sees a bronc's legs, so I elevates the muzzle of my gun and salutes him.

A COUPLE of bullets whispers through the logs, so I rolls over past the bed. My elbow bumps on something, and I glances down.

"Come here!" I yells. "Here's a cellar!" and I begins tugging at the carpet what covers the door. If the carpet hadn't been ripped I'd 'a' never found it. Magpie skids over to me on his hands and knees, and begins heaving on the handle.

"Don't!" yelps the lady. "Don't go down there! There's a—a—snake down there!"

"Preferable to hot lead," I yells, and slips over the square hole in the floor.

Magpie don't wait to crawl down—he hopped. *Bang.* A gun explodes right at my lower extremity, and I feels that I got to buy a new pair of suspenders. It sure was close. I lets loose and drops about seven feet. The door drops back and we're in darkness.

"Did I fall on yuh, Ike?" asks Magpie.

"You did not," says I, groping around.

"Well, I fell on somebody," he proclaims. "Got a match handy?"

I lights a match and sees Magpie setting on a man's stummick. The feller looks sort of yaller in the face, and I don't think he's got much fight left in his carcass. He's still got a gun in his hand, the same of which we removes. Magpie looks him over and snaps some bracelets on his wrists.

"Safety first, Ike," says he. Another match shows a rifle against the wall. Sudden-like Magpie remembers.

"Gosh, Ike! We've forgot the lady!"

There's a box down there, which we hauls over under the door. Magpie climbs up and lifts the trap so we can see, and it sure is some tableau.

The door is open. There stands that feller Brand, with a grin on his face, and behind him is all the Piperock population that can crowd in. The lady is standing there against the wall, and all to once she drops her hand.

Bang. This Brand person's gun comes up and explodes, and the lady falls on her face. Magpie moves some quick. He flops out of that cellar, whirls on the crowd with a gun in each hand.

"You danged coward!" he yelps at Brand. "Shoot a defenseless woman, will yuh! Drop your guns!"

Every gun in sight hit the ground, and the lady staggers to her feet.

"Give me a gun," she pants at Magpie, but Magpie just stares at her.

I takes a look and stares a few lines myself. Her hair is on her shoulder—plumb off her head, and the hair of her head is brown and parted on the side.

"Uh—uh—" stutters Magpie.

Brand steps over and takes the guns out of Magpie's unresisting hands. Brand turns to the partly scalped person:

"Better set down, Kid. You got plenty of nerve, but we seem to have got you this time, eh? Little pale around the gills."

"Pale around the gills, eh?" snarls the person. "Dang you, Brand, you would be too. That blasted fresh sheriff busted in a while ago without knocking and I had to swaller my chew. I been too sick to fight."

"Where's Blazer?"

"In the cellar with irons on," says I. "We'd 'a' had this Kid Corey, too, if yuh hadn't been so blasted previous. Any time yuh don't think this sheriff's office is on the job yuh got another think coming."

"I suppose that's why Simpkins threw a gun down on me when I shot at the Kid," laughs Brand. "Did I hit yuh, Kid?"

"No, dang yuh! It burnt my ribs, so I drops safe. I'm just getting over one chunk of lead in the shoulder. That's why I had to let my hand down, Brand. It hurt like thunder. I told that fool of a Blazer to lay low with me, but he thought we had some easy pickings around here. I kept cases on the sheriff's office, that's about all I was able to do. Didn't I make a good female?"

"Magpie ain't to blame," says I. "I'd 'a' likely fell, too, if I'd 'a' been as susceptible as Magpie. He was wise to Blazer, but not to the Kid. I reckon the money is in that box in the cellar, ain't it, Kid?"

"There ain't no use lying about it—it is," he states.

"What I'd like to know is this," states Ricky Henderson, "who was we shooting at? Was it Blazer or the Kid?"

"Neither one," says I. "You was shooting at me. Danged fools try to take the law in their own hands and mess things up. Think the sheriff don't know his business, and—gosh, I sure do hate a posse."

We deposits the Kid and Blazer in jail, and then me and Magpie goes back to our shack. I puts on some water for coffee, and then turns to Magpie.

"Shall I make coffee like she did?" I asks.

Magpie lays his hat on the table.

"Ike, you make it according to the old formula. I'm sick for a cup of real coffee."

He smokes for a while and then—

"Ike, old-timer, we been a pair of fools."

"Have been," I agrees. "Lucky fools, Magpie. Luck in finding that trap-door: lucky that I didn't give you ten whole minutes alone with her—him. You might 'a' proposed, Magpie. Aw, yes, you would, old-timer, 'cause you was loco with love. Did yuh kiss her—him, Magpie?"

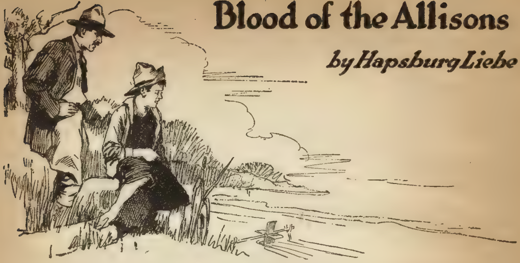
"No-o-o. I was going to, Ike—honest to gosh! But I sudden-like recognized that picture, which we deciphers to be her dear departed, and then I didn't. Sabe?"

"Oh, ho! So you lost heart when yuh recognized him, eh? Who was he?"

"Well, Ike, she didn't lie about it—now, did she? She only said he was a good man. He sure was, Ike. Best they ever made."

"I'll bite, Magpie. Who was he?"

"Abraham Lincoln."



Blood of the Allisons

by Hapsburg Liebe

Author of "Tennessee Joe," "The Bully of the Big Santee," etc.

HE WAS eleven years old, and he belonged to the aristocracy of Tennessee's mountains, on his mother's side of the house; his father had been a good-looking and good-natured, lazy North Carolina hillman to whom a hound dog was of as much value as a woman—which, after all, is saying very little against his regard for women. He lived, this boy, with his pretty widowed young mother in a small cabin near the head of the rather thickly settled valley that is called Little Jerusalem, of which "Daredevil" Delaney was king.

His mother sewed for their living, therefore they were poor enough. His wardrobe consisted of two hickory shirts, two pairs of brown jeans knee-trousers with four genuine pockets to each, two suits of home-made underwear, one pair of very red suspenders, and a gone-to-seed felt hat that he wore turned straight up in front, desperado fashion. He scorned to chew tobacco, run from anybody, or tell an outright lie; and he swore fluently as a sort of safety-valve, but his silent and patient mother didn't know it. This was the one secret that he had ever kept from her.

Buckner Newland was his name. They called him "Buck," and he was inordinately proud of it. It made him feel like a man.

Buck walked, this still and hazy October afternoon, down the crooked and stony road that led down the crooked and stony creek, until he came to a small field of ripe corn. There he filched the biggest cornstalk he could find, and then he hastened over to the narrow stream, sat himself down beside it, opened his bone-handled barlow knife and began to whittle out the parts of a water-wheel.

Made and set in the water correctly, you know, a cornstalk water-wheel with a stick-weed axle will run almost forever, unless the creek gets up. Buck knew exactly how to make and set them in the water correctly. He was now planning to put one every twenty yards the entire length of the stream.

Suddenly his knife slipped and cut his finger. He was just finishing.

"—— the thing!" Buck exclaimed.

Quickly he felt a pang of guilt, and he looked around to see whether anybody had heard him who would tell his mother. Though he frequently disobeyed her, being blood of her blood and bone of her bone, he held her in great reverence; she was the whole world to him.

And there behind him, at the side of the road, smiling just a little, was a strange man of about thirty, who sat astride a sleek and well-saddled black horse. The man was dressed in blue serge, with a blue flannel shirt and a slim black four-in-hand tie; he wore a broad-rimmed black hat, and leggings of yellow leather; he was sunburned and strong-looking, and his teeth were big and white and beautiful.

"All right!" snapped Buck, defiantly.

That was the Allison in him, which, happily, predominated.

Then the stranger saw the boy's bleeding finger, and he seemed rather concerned. He threw his horse's rein over its head, dismounted springily, drew a white handkerchief from his pocket and advanced upon Buck.

"Le's tie it up, son," he drawled in the drawl of the hills. "And ef I was you, son, I wouldn't cuss no more. It sounds rotten."

Buck never forgot that he liked that man the very first time he saw him. He submitted to having his finger bandaged. Then he turned to the task of putting the water-wheel into the creek, and the man watched him with interest. The wheel soon began to run musically.

"Listen!" said Buck, enthused. "Listen at 'er! Clippety-clippety-clip! Don't she go purty?"

"It shore does," smiled the strange man. He smiled easily. "What's ye name, son?"

"Buck. Buck Newland."

The other's face became serious, went just a trifle white.

"Newland," he muttered, "Newland. What was ye mother's fust name?"

"Mary."

"Which used to be Mary Allison? She used to live here; she married Tom Newland, o' Nawth Ca'liner, and went home with him to live, and Tom died; and she moved back here a few days ago—am I right, Buck?"

"Yeuh; ye're shore right. Mother takes in sewin'; the's more folks lives here to sew for, ye see, 'an the' was lived in Nawth Ca'liner. Mister, might I ax what yore name is?"

The man watched the lad's countenance closely when he gave it—

"Delaney."

But the name meant nothing to the boy. Buck looked once more at the flying water-wheel, then he grinned up at his companion:

"How'll ye swap knives?"

"Even, and sight unseen," came readily, though he had already seen Buck's. "Give ye mine for your'n. Are ye game?"

"My middle name is game," said Buck.

He swapped a fifteen-cent barlow for a handsome dollar-and-a-half, stag-handled jackknife!

"Ye don't mean it!" cried Buck.

Again Delaney smiled.

"I reckon I do, son. So long, and good luck!"

With that he mounted his horse and galloped away.

It was the finest of all the knives that Buck had ever seen. It drowned out all interest in the monopoly of cornstalk water-wheels that he had planned; even the finger he had cut with the old barlow was forgotten. He ran toward home to show his prize of prizes to his mother.

"Looky here!" he exclaimed as he dashed in at the open cabin doorway.

Then he stopped short. There, talking with his mother, was Little Jerusalem's herb-digger, fortune-teller, and newspaper, old and wrinkled Granny Hood, with her pipe of clay and her sourwood staff. She was smoking like a burning brush-heap. Buck saw that she wore a dark calico dress, a red bandanna, and a red undershirt—at least.

"What is it, Bucky boy?" asked Mary Newland.

He went to her and showed her the knife, He told her all that he had to tell about his new friend. Mary Newland turned a little pale at the name, even as Delaney had gone a little pale at hers. She took the handsome knife to the fire that smoldered in the wide-mouthed stone fireplace, and consigned it to the live coals; then she unwrapped the crimson-stained handkerchief from her son's injured finger and was about to throw it, too, into the fire, when Granny Hood called shrilly:

"Don't Mary! It's bad luck! It's bad luck to burn blood!"

Mary Newland dropped the handkerchief to the hearth. Perhaps, she reasoned, it would be better to wash it and send it back, to let him know that she didn't care to be under obligations to him for even the wrapping of a finger.

BUCK wondered at this. To Buck it was the un-understandable. During all that century of time, his mother had never said a word. The look in her eyes had kept him from uttering a protest. He turned to Granny Hood, as though he expected her to tell him what was the matter. The old scandal-monger was by no means loath.

"That was Daredevil Delaney, boy," she croaked, "and he's a plumb bad man. He's rich; he heired his daddy's farm and big frame house at the lower end o' this here valley, whar he lives with his maw. He owns timber, and cattle, sheeps, and hosses. He's as wild as a buck deer, and he fights like a wildcat what a mad dawg has bit, and he robs. The law don't seem to be able to git any proof on him. And yit, I did hear o' the county sheriff afore this'n a sayin' 'at Daredevil made about the best law they could have out here——"

At this point Mary Newland interrupted in a tremulous, white voice:

"That'll be enough about Hale Delaney, I reckon, Granny Hood. Maybe you didn't know it, but I don't 'low his name spoke in my house, Granny."

The peppery old woman rose on her long staff, half-angry, and turned toward the door. But she stopped and faced about.

"He was a fine young man ontel ye throwed him down, Mary, and you know it as well's ye know night's dark. He hain't never keered for nothin' sence that day. I reckon I won't bother ye no more."

"And I reckon I won't cry about it," was the spicy reply of the young widow.

Granny Hood stamped her way out on her sourwood staff. Mrs. Newland went back to her sewing, but she seemed to do everything wrong. Even Buck noticed it. Finally a question took form in his mind, and he decided to risk asking it.

"Mother, what made ye throw him down?"

"It was afore I was married," she said solemnly. "We had the wo'st quarrel in the world. I swore I never would speak to him no more, and I never have. And I never will."

The truth of the matter was that she had married for spite, as women—more especially women of the mountains—do now and then. For herself she had made a thorny bed, but she had lain in it well, oh, exceedingly well; which went far to prove the soul of a martyr saint deep down in the woman. She had the intense nature, and the corresponding temper of lightning-fire, of a people who had fought themselves well nigh to extinction; and she was still angry at Daredevil Delaney because she loved him above everything, except Buck, on earth. But she wouldn't admit it to herself. Never! You know how women are with their love affairs.

Contrary to Granny Hood's opinion of the matter, Mary Allison's "throwing him down" had not made Delaney the man he was. Had he married her, he would have been the same wild, good-natured and rollicking, free-blooded daredevil that he was, though he probably wouldn't have gambled any. The greatest result of her refusing to be his wife had been only that he had remained unmarried.

Now this Delaney was not what one might call bad. He simply saw that the people of his neighborhood and neighboring neighborhoods lived with a fair semblance of correctness, that was all. If a man was not providing for his family, he had a warning; if he did not immediately mend his ways, Daredevil Delaney gave him a whipping that he did not soon forget. Delaney caused men to pay their debts, support the preacher, and buy more corn-meal and bacon than yellow-corn whisky.

Of course, he had his enemies as well as his friends; and, of course, there had been committed grave crimes that had been put at his door—which was inevitable, and which often had placed him in jeopardy and made his position one scarcely to be envied.

"Mother," suddenly asked Buck, "are ye sick? Ye look like ye was."

Mary Newland that was Mary Allison turned her eyes upward from the sewing that was now so difficult for her to do.

"I—I think I am, a little. I think I ought 'o walk out some, maybe."

She rose and dropped her sewing to her chair; she put on her blue gingham bonnet, and started for the door.

"Le's go down to see my flutter-wheel," suggested Buck. "Y'ought 'o see it agoin' clippety-clippety-clip. Will ye, mother?"

"Maybe you'd better stay around home," said Mary Newland.

She passed across the threshold, and went slowly toward the gate.

The boy stood in the cabin doorway and watched her go with keen disappointment in his clear brown eyes. It was very unlike her to refuse to let him accompany her anywhere. Buck did not know that, down the valley and up a silent, hemlock-filled cove, there was an old trysting-place that was still to her a shrine—a great and beautiful white beech tree laden with golden yellow leaves, and under it a bubbling spring bordered with sword-ferns and laurel, while cut in the bark of the tree were the almost grown-over initials, M. A.

and H. D. Nor did Buck know that the old shrine was calling, calling to his mother as it had never, never called before.

The lad walked down to the ripe cornfield, took another big cornstalk, went back to the cabin and borrowed a table-knife from the cupboard, and made a cornstalk fiddle. It was after sundown when Mary Newland returned.

The following morning, she washed and ironed Daredevil Delaney's handkerchief—and she did a job to be proud of—wrapped it in a page of an old story-paper, and sent Buck to the Delaney home with it.

"Go right to the house, and come right back," she instructed. "Don't stay, and don't talk to 'em."

"Wellum," said Buck.

Once in the crooked road, Buck decided that he was utterly too weary to walk such a great distance—it was fully a mile; therefore he broke off a long, frostbitten ironweed for a sleek black horse, mounted it, and rode at a gallop most of the way to the Delaney frame house at the lower end of the valley. The house set a hundred yards from the road, and there were apple-trees before it and to either side of it and marching up the gentle slope behind it. It had been painted white, and honeysuckles ran over the front porch. A hound ran out and growled at him, and the voice of Daredevil Delaney promptly scolded it back.

"Come on in, son," said Delaney. "I won't let him bite ye."

Buck went on. Delaney sat on the porch, plaiting a rawhide band for his hat; he rose and pushed his chair toward the boy. Buck shook his head, and tossed the little package into the other's hands. Then he turned to go.

"Wait, Buck," smiled Delaney; and Buck forgot orders from headquarters and waited.

To him that voice was magic; to him that man stood for all that was big and fine, noble and bold.

Delaney began to open the package. When he saw and recognized his own handkerchief, now snow-white and immaculate and folded so very precisely, he muttered under his breath—

"Allison."

His strong face at once became a study. It was almost as though he saw a ray of hope. He went on, aloud—

"She wasn't mad, was she, son?"

Again Buck forgot his instructions. He answered readily:

"Yeuh, she was mad. She burnt up that knife you gi' me, and now I ain't got no more knife 'an a rabbit. Granny Hood she said yore name was Daredevil; is it?"

Delaney ignored the question, and drew a fifteen-cent, bone-handled barlow from one of his trousers pockets.

"It shore ain't fair for me to keep this when you've got none," he drawled; "here, take it, Buck."

The boy accepted it very gladly.

"Now wait," said Delaney, "ontel I come back."

HE WENT into the house. Through an open window in the old-fashioned parlor, Buck saw him place the folded handkerchief reverently between the leaves of a big family Bible, as though it were some frail, dead flower connected with memories that were sacred. Three minutes later, and Delaney came back with his smiling little old mother, and in her hands she carried a molasses cake and a paper bag of red apples.

"This is her boy," said Delaney. "He looks like her, now don't he?"

"As much as beans," the feeble old woman laughed weakly. She gave Buck the bag of apples and the molasses cake, and continued: "Sonny, tell ye mother I'd be pow'ful glad ef she'd come to see me. Tell her I'd come to see her, ef I jest wasn't so porely. La, la! But Mary Allison used to be so purty that the sight of her would might' nigh it cyore sore eyes! I'd shore like to see her, sonny."

"She's a heap purtier now 'an she ever was," declared Buck. "She gits purtier and purtier every day. Wimmen like her don't never git ugly—Lord, no! Sometimes I quit aplayin' and go to the house jest to have a look at her, she's that consarned purty——"

A bass voice that Buck had never heard before interrupted, and it came from somewhere not far beyond the vines that almost walled in the porch:

"I beg your pardon, Daredevil, and I sure do hate to do it, but I got to arrest you in the name o' the law."

It was one of the high sheriff's lowland deputies, and he walked heavily to the top of the porch steps. Delaney's countenance flashed less serious. He almost smiled.

"I reckon," he replied, "ye don't mind a tellin' me what I done."

"You're accused of beating old Curtis Holden until he died from it, and robbing him. Curtis Holden himself said so, told a dozen before he winked out. It was yesterday afternoon about four o'clock, in Holden's sitting-room."

Delaney's face now became serious again.

"Look here, Emmett, you know I wouldn't beat a' old man like that. You know I never done it. Holden might ha' reely thought it was me, what with his imaginin's and his nighsightedness and my repitation, but it shore wasn't me. I'm white, Emmett, and you know it."

"To tell you the truth, I don't believe you did it," Emmett admitted; "but orders are orders, and I got to arrest you."

"I beg leave to differ with ye," snapped out Delaney. "To be arrested is to be sent to the State prison for life—if I ain't hung—for somethin' I didn't do. To git down to facts, you ain't man enough, Emmett, to put irons on me; and you wouldn't shoot me, acause you yoreself don't believe I done it; so how are ye agoin' to arrest me, Emmett?"

The deputy did not draw a weapon because he believed that he could accomplish more by means of his great strength alone. Delaney was unarmed, and Emmett was a big man; besides, Delaney knew that the other wouldn't shoot. Emmett turned to the much-troubled Mrs. Delaney.

"Please step into the house," he requested kindly.

"Go, mother," said the mountaineer; and she went.

Buck Newland stood like a post, his face as serious as a mask of Napoleon, and watched every movement of the deputy as he took handcuffs from his belt and advanced upon his man. Delaney's eyes flashed at the sight of the disgraceful irons; he went suddenly white as he put out his wrists as though to receive the manacles. A look of satisfaction spread over Emmett's countenance. But Delaney seized the irons, tore them from the other's hands, and jammed them into one of his own rear trousers pockets!

For one second Emmett stared in surprise. They sprang to the ground and faced each other. To run from one man was much against Delaney's liking, though the officer now had drawn a weapon. Delaney dove under with the lithe quickness of a panther; with his left hand he caught Emmett's gun-wrist, and with his right he wrenched the revolver free; then he struck the deputy a chest blow that staggered him, stepped backward, and threw the revolver over apple-trees and into a blackberry thicket.

At this, the lowlander did a thing an officer of the law never should have done: he flew into a rage, gritted out an oath, and struck at the hillman with a punch that might have broken bones if it had landed. From that moment it became a good, round battle. Emmett was the stronger of the two, but his adversary was electric.

They squared themselves and put up their guards, much as lumberjack fighters do. Buck stepped to the ground; his molasses cake was squeezed almost flat under one arm, and his face was flushed with fiery interest. Emmett put himself on the offensive at once; he struck, feinted, struck again and landed on the other's shoulder, spinning him around.

"Hit him!" fairly screamed Buck. "Why don't ye bust him, Daredevil?"

Delaney recovered himself in a way that delighted the boy. He had to fight now, and for his life; to run from an unarmed man was unthinkable, and he couldn't be arrested. He darted in, cleverly and deliberately slapped Emmett on the jaw and drew Emmett's arms upward, then broke under with a mighty blow and drove the deputy backward twenty feet.

"Dawg-gone!" yelled Buck. "That was a lulu!"

By this time Emmett had forgotten all about arresting Delaney; to the deputy it had become a personal matter. He came back with a hoarse bellow, like a maddened bull, and struck half a dozen blows that landed on nothing more solid than air. Delaney gave him a punch on the point of the jaw, and it dazed him for a moment.

"Pour it to him!" cried Buck. "Pour it to him, Daredevil! Ye've shore got him now, ef ye'll only pour it to him!"

Emmett went at his adversary again, and, using a part of Delaney's own battling tactics, knocked Delaney flat. The hillman lay there, supine, as though he were unconscious, for a few seconds, and the panting deputy watched him closely. Buck Newland put the molasses cake and the apples on the porch, took out his barlow knife and opened it.

"Don't ye hit him," he told Emmett, "while he's down. Ef ye do, I'll cut a hole in ye."

Delaney rose, came to life like a steel spring, and the real battle began. For five minutes they battered each other, and blood flowed from their faces. Then Emmett sought for a clench; his wind was weakening, while Delaney was going faster than ever. Delaney slipped on the grass, and Emmett leaped to his back. But Delaney straightened his legs and had the giant on his hip; a supreme effort, and the big lowlander was thrown over Delaney's head and into a heap.

Another moment, and the mountaineer had taken the manacles from his pocket and snapped them on Emmett's wrists!

"You're a man," he said, smiling and panting at the same time, "that I'd haf to kill, to whip. I don't want to kill ye, Emmett. I'd sudgest that ye go back to Sheriff Hanley and explain to him what a merry job he's agoin' to have a-takin' Hale Delaney to jail."

Without a word in reply, Emmett rose and walked down the road, mounted his horse, and rode toward Johnsville in the flat country. When he was out of sight, Delaney turned to Buck.

"How'd ye like that, son?"

"Fine!" Buck answered. "I wisht I was a man."

"But I hope ye'll have more plain common sense 'an I've had, son," muttered Daredevil Delaney, very seriously, "when ye're a man."

He sat down on the steps, bent his head, and was very still. He was a fool for having made the name he had made for himself. To leave his invalid mother entirely was a thing he could not do, and they would arrest him sooner or later; and when they did arrest him, his reputation would cost him his life.

Mrs. Delaney came out and sat down on the step above him. She put a wrinkled old hand on his thick black hair, and she too was very still.

The silence was too much for Buck. He took up the presents the mother of Daredevil Delaney had given him, went down to the dusty road, mounted his ironweed horse and galloped toward home. To take the cake and the fruit to his mother would be to lose them, he knew; so he stopped at the water-wheel and made a cache there among the stones.

He didn't show her the barlow knife, either; he didn't dare. But he told her all that which Mrs. Delaney had said to tell her, and he gave a very vivid account of the fight. And the latter-named was quite sufficient to cause Mary Newland to scorch the bread they had for dinner.

CURTIS HOLDEN was not generally loved like a brother, but he was an old man, and sentiment over the county ran high against Hale Delaney. Officers were soon combing the big hills for him, and a substantial reward was offered. Delaney remained in the Little Jerusalem neighborhood, and he was put to his wits' end, day and night, to provide food for himself and to elude the men who hunted him singly and by twos and threes. It was not the officers that he feared; the enemies who hunted him for the sake of the reward, the Judases—it was those whom he feared. They knew the fastnesses of the mountains, even as he knew them.

Then the meanest and most villainous of all those enemies discovered Daredevil Delaney's hiding-place. It was high up on the side of the western mountain, in a nest of cliffs and boulders, and it was impregnable to two, four, or six. Ten men might take Delaney from that retreat, but that would split the reward into ten parts. This long-haired and lanky, cunning enemy figured for hours to find out how many times ten would go into a thousand, and shook his head when he finally knew. Then he laid a plan.

He had his slatternly third wife go to Buckner Newland, the only boy in Little Jerusalem who didn't know her, with a smooth tale. She found Buck playing beside the cornstalk water-wheel, as usual.

"Listen at her," said Buck. "Clippety-clippety-clip! Don't she go purty?"

"Sonny," the woman began wheedlingly, "do you know Daredevil Delaney?"

"Yeuh," nodded Buck. "And I like him wuss'n 'most anything. Why? They ain't got him, have they?"

"No, they ain't got him. Well, his mother she's awful sick. About to die. She wants him to sneak home to see her jest as quick as ever he can. D'ye reckon ye could find him and tell him? He wouldn't hide from you. He wouldn't be askeered o' you, ye see. Tell him his Cousin Lucy sent ye."

According to the plan, Delaney would walk into the hands of the high sheriff. For Delaney was the man to go to his mother, if she were dying and sent for him, though he hung for it. There were a number of things he held dearer than his life.

"Are you his Cousin Lucy?" asked the boy.

"Yes," lied Mrs. Tinker Davis III. "Will ye go, sonny?"

"Ef I knowed," said Buck, "whar to look."

The woman pointed.

"Ye see them big rocks away off up yander? Ye might go up thar and look. It's shore a likely place."

"I'll go, shore," Buck told her.

He rose, crossed the little stream on stones, and dove into the laurels, and the woman went down the road. In spite of the ruggedness of the mountainside, and in spite of the newly fallen chestnut burrs that now and then pricked his feet painfully, the boy reached the temporary haunt of his god after an hour of traveling.

Instead of his finding Delaney, naturally, Delaney found him. Buck had climbed to the top of a low cliff, and was searching the city of boulders above with all his eyes, when Delaney spoke from a point a short distance to his left.

"Well, son?"

The hunted man was pale and starved-looking, and his gaze was so piercing that it almost scared Buck Newland. Perched on the brink of that little precipice, Buck delivered the message of Mrs. Tinker Davis III. word for word. Now the outlawed Delaney had a Cousin Lucy, of course.

"What sort o' lookin' woman was she?" he immediately wanted to know.

"She was dressed in yeller and red, and she toted a spicewood toothbresh in her mouth, and she had a wart on her nose."

The man before Buck smiled worriedly.

"Wart on her nose; eh? Unlucky wart, Missis Tinker Davis," he growled. "That's shore a lowdown trick to try to play on me. Anybody that'd try to do a trick like that, Buck, is a—ought 'o be killed plumb dead. Buck, you do me this here favor; go straight to Missis Tinker Davis, the polecat, and tell her I'll make her wisht I'd tarred and feathered her man, ef I live. Now be keerful——"

A groan broke from his throat. Buck had started back down the little cliff, and Buck had lost his hold and fallen. There was no outcry, and this fact frightened Daredevil Delaney. He rushed to the brink and peered over. Crumpled down there on the dead leaves was the inert figure of his one-time sweetheart's barefooted, tow-headed boy, with a tiny trickle of crimson lying across his white and upturned face.

Delaney climbed down hurriedly. He knelt and took Buck's head and shoulders to his knee, and with his handkerchief wiped away the blood that had come from a wound in the lad's temple.

"Son," he mumbled agonizedly, thickly, tears filling his eyes, "son! Ye ain't dead, are ye, son?"

There was no answer. He put his ear to the youthful chest, and heard faintly the beating of the youthful heart. He believed Buck was dying; the heartbeats were much too faint, it seemed to him.

"Ef Tinker Davis don't pay for this," he said in a voice that was bleak, "oh ef Tinker Davis don't pay for this!"

For to him it was no accident. He gathered the limp little body up in his arms, with the law and its minions and all his enemies forgotten, and began to move rapidly, with the surefootedness of a panther, down the rugged steep and into danger. He well knew how that life he held against his breast was valued. If it went out for him—for his sake—he well knew what that would mean, too. A prayer went up from the soul of him that the boy might live, and at the bottom of it there was nothing selfish.

He crossed the brook at the water-wheel, waded it with his boots on when he might have crossed on stones, and he noted absently that the wheel was still running—clippety-clippety-clip. Into the crooked road he turned, and Sheriff Hanley, hidden alone a little away down the valley, saw him and put spurs to his horse. Riding up beside Delaney, he leveled his revolver at the small of his back.

"You're under arrest, Daredevil. I've got you."

Delaney didn't stop. He turned a white and desperate face toward the officer.

"Come on wi' me, Sheriff," he replied. "You can have me as soon as I've took this boy home. I never have broke a promise."

Sheriff Hanley leaned over and snatched his prisoner's revolver from its holster as he rode on beside him. At the Newlands' gate he dismounted and left his horse with its rein hanging, and followed the other man into the cabin. Mary Newland rose at their sudden entrance, and her sewing dropped to the floor. Delaney went straight to the bed, and put the raglike form down on an old pieced coverlet.

"He fell—" he began, and could say no more.

Buck's mother knelt beside him, and just then Buck came to. His wound was not serious. For a moment he stared at one and then at the other of the two men. He knew the sheriff; the officer had been pointed out to him. Quickly he put things together, and he understood fully. Then he fastened accusing eyes on the face of the representative of the law, and his voice came slowly, in words that cut—

"Mister Sheriff, ye're a —— yeller dawg."

"Buck," his mother reproved, half-sobbing.

Delaney, filled with gratitude, looked at the woman. She rose, and returned the look. It was a very peculiar look. Then the officer put his hand on his man's shoulder, and Delaney muttered this:

"I said ye could have me. So ye can."

They took Daredevil Delaney to Johnsville, where they lodged him in the strongest cell they had. Many, many were those who visited the jail for a glimpse of him. A newspaper man came up from Knoxville, tried to get him to talk and tried to photograph him—and failed all around.

Court was in session at Johnsville, and Delaney's trial was called without delay. The sentiment of the general public had grown even higher against him, and those who were considered versed in such matters openly predicted that he would soon straighten out a hangman's rope.

THE day of the trial was hazy, and the snap of Autumn was in the air. Everybody that was anybody in Little Jerusalem went; Buck Newland and his mother rode in chairs in the back of old Abner Lane's ox-wagon. Half of Mary Newland had been trying to persuade her that she wouldn't help Hale Delaney to save his immortal soul, while the other half had been telling her that she must save him—if she could. Perhaps this was why she sat down with her boy midway of the crowded courthouse.

An elderly man with billygoat whiskers and a broad, bare upper lip sat next to the young widow and her son, chewed store-bought tobacco and spat through a knot-hole in the floor, and berated Daredevil Delaney for all he was worth. One-half of Buck's pretty mother rejoiced at it, and the other half resented it. All of Buck resented it bitterly.

"You'd be askeered to talk that way," suddenly blurted the lad, "ef he wasn't whar he's at. And you wouldn't talk that away ef I was as big as you, neither."

"Buck!" said Mary Newland.

She had never heard him declare himself so strongly in favor of Delaney before.

"That little rat's pizen mean," the billygoat-bearded man laughed to his neighbor.

"I ain't no rat!" flared the boy, spiritedly—and out came his barlow knife; it was the Allison in him. "And ef ye call me that any more, I'll shore cut ye to the windpipe!"

"Buck!" Mary Newland moaned, shocked; but she needn't have been surprised, for it was only the Allison in him.

He wasn't called a rat again. She caught him by the arm, and drew him over to her.

"Son," she whispered queerly, "do ye like Hale Delaney?"

Buck looked her squarely in the eyes.

"Like him? I love him."

Then the trial began. The evidence was most damaging. Curtis Holden's dying statement counted heavily. Counsel for the defense proved that Holden was half-blind, and that it was nearly dark in Holden's sitting-room at four o'clock in the afternoon, but all that seemed to impress the jury but little. Delaney's reputation was very bad.

It was short. Soon the judge was charging the jury, and it was not in favor of the accused.

Just as the charge was being finished, Mary Newland rose—and Buck followed her—and went up to the judge. She was sworn, and she took the witness stand for the prisoner, who could hardly believe he saw correctly. And there she did that which to the woman of the mountains is next to death: she bravely told the world of her early love affair with Hale Delaney, and of their bitter quarrel; of her marrying for spite, and of her lying for five years in the bed of thorns she had made; of her struggle to support herself and her son; of the burning of the knife that Hale Delaney had given to the boy.

Then she told of her going to the old beech at the bubbling spring, the old beech that had their initials cut in its white bark; she told of watching Delaney renew those initials with the knife that had been her boy's, and of watching him for a long time while he sat there and thought of the very things that were in her own mind.

And that had been from three to five o'clock on the afternoon of October fourth, the very time of Curtis Holden's assault and robbery!

Mary Newland withstood the most grilling cross-questioning; they couldn't entangle her. Counsel for the defense made his argument again, and this time it had strength with the jury. Delaney was acquitted; received a kindly lecture from the judge, and promised to remember it.

When he looked for Mary Newland that had been Mary Allison, she was gone back to her cabin in Little Jerusalem. He bought a marriage license and followed her.

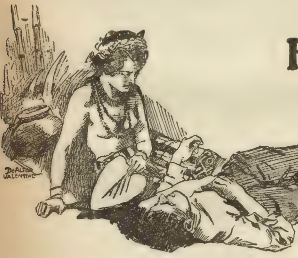
Buck Newland and his mother sat by a bright log fire, roasting chestnuts, that chill mountain evening, when a rap came at the door. Buck called out a cordial "Come in!" The door opened, and Hale Delaney entered; he walked straight to the stone hearth, knelt before her who had been his first and only sweetheart, and took up both her hands.

"This is the fust time I've ever bent my knees to anything mortal in the universe, Mary," he said. "I'm askin' ye to marry me."

Allison looked across to Allison. The boy's eyes twinkled hopefully in the firelight, and she remembered his saying in the courthouse: "I love him." She lifted the kneeling man's hands to her lips and kissed them; she bent her head to his shoulder, happy because hate was dead.

"I've burnt enough blood," she told him. "I'll marry ye, Hale."

The next week Delaney was made a deputy sheriff, and the week after that he arrested Tinker Davis for the robbery and murder of Curtis Holden. And Mrs. Tinker Davis III. wished, before it was over, that Daredevil Delaney had tarred and feathered her husband instead.



Heathens

by Gordon Young

Author of "The Serpent's Phrase," "His Wonders to Perform," etc.

THE young stranger—Rideout was his name, a nephew of "Buck" Rideout, the planter—sat on the outrigger of a beached canoe and stared at the dark-hued Tavau, who stood some distance away as she coyly poked the sand with her toes and glanced up from time to time with artful shyness.

"Women," said "Lean Jake," removing his pipe and scratching his chin with the mouthpiece, "women is all alike."

Having delivered that favorite bit of wisdom, he replaced the pipe and continued to watch Rideout, who was ready enough to carry the flirtation forward, but hesitated a little, being embarrassed by the presence of Jake and myself as we stretched in the shade beside the shanty bar and idly looked on.

"Nice boy," Jake said some minutes later after the enticing Tavau had walked out of sight in the pandanus grove with the breeze immodestly pulling her calico gown against her body; and after Rideout had followed her, but with an effort to appear merely wandering at random.

"Nice boy," Jake repeated, "but he's learnin' fast—learnin' fast."

Jake called it "lar-r-nnin'," and disguised many other words in much the same way; but he spoke from the wisdom of sixty-odd years, more than forty of them spent below the equator. For all of his years, he was built like six feet some inches of taut hawser. An old-time sailor he was, but beardless, slow of movement and speech, and as full of yarns as ever a man was who has roved. No doubt some of those yarns were true.

"But he's learnin' fast," Jake went on, nodding his head toward the grove. "He's twenty-some hours on the island and hasn't been bit by a cannibal yet. He thought they'd be ugly as the pictures always is that missionaries send back to help raise funds, and then Tavau gets her eyes on him. And he just simply can't hardly believe his own eyes 'cause she acts like some of the girls back home—only does it better. Yes. He's learnin' fast.

"And he thinks the devil won't sign him up for no longer cruise on the sulfur lake for an hour or so with this heathen than for hours or so with other Marys he's forgot quick-like; and her bein' a heathen it don't make no difference no-how. Uh-huh, he's got a lot to learn, too."

The Rev. Ollivant and his niece, Miss Rankin, would have been shocked to know that Jake called Tavau a heathen; for didn't she wear a calico gown instead of a yellow *tiputa* and *lava-lava?* The missionaries thought the wrapper much more civilized than a breast-cloth, usually tucked under the chin to be out of the way, or else failing its purpose with every puff of wind when not tucked up; and the *lava-lava* had never been devised that did not appear on the verge of dropping from the shapely legs it concealed.

"Uh-huh, he's got a lot to learn," Jake repeated thoughtfully, again glancing toward the grove.

JAKE had a wild and extravagant yarn for special confidences about having known and fought under the chief who had been Tavau's grandfather; of having held a musket to the heads of an enemy boat-crew as he sailed away in the starless night for whatever port God willed, to keep Tavau's grandmother, Numoo, from being the prize as she had been the cause of that obscure Homeric war wherein her husband fell beneath a jagged club.

Numoo must have been a fiery and resolute woman if she did not only what Jake, but legend as well, reported of her. She was said to have stood watch with the musket when Jake needs must sleep; and the ancient gods of her Tongian people answered her prayers, for the canoe reached a not unfriendly island where Numoo was welcomed and the crew, at her vengeful request, was promptly beheaded.

Numoo married a chief and at last succeeded in nagging him into war for her revenge; but he fared badly because the missionaries were busy in his domain and reported him to the British Government as a turbulent, blood-thirsty fellow who had killed some of their converts. A gunboat scattered his war canoes and Numoo was again a widow.

She prayed that the unborn child would be a son, and went daily deep into the forest to an idol hidden from the jealous missionaries; but the bulging-eyed god answered her with a daughter, whom, to keep from the missionaries, she carried to another island and raised in the faith of her tribal gods. The white men — traders, beachcombers, colonists and inevitable missionaries—crowded even that island; but the daughter, Naima, was instructed in the old Tongian faith. As she grew up into her teens she was wooed in the divers ways of the white men, with, however, less success than the amorous adventurers often have.

But to make Lean Jake's epic brief: after the mother's death Naima married the handsomest of the unconverted natives, who happened to be a Samoan; and to the great amusement and scandal of the island a few years later she clubbed him out of his own hut when the missionaries finally saved his soul, largely through the efficacy of a job—so delightful to Samoan vanity—of bossing in the construction of some thatched huts for the missionary station. But Tavau, the seven-year old daughter, was forcibly taken from the incorrigibly heathenish mother and given into Christian hands; and later she was sent to the Rev. Ollivant and his niece as a mission girl at Niko.

That was ten years before; but in the South Seas seven years plus ten bring a girl to maturity of body and to all the instinctive subtleties of womanhood everywhere.

There is another dramatic chapter to this history, a chapter that I suspected of being apochryphal and added for the benefit of the big German trader, Schwartz. Ever since Tavau came to Niko he had been after her; and Jake opportunely either invented or remembered the chapter in which Tavau's mother, shortly before her death, had driven a fishing spear into the belly of an overly gallant trader who, inevitably enough, had been a German—since Jake detested all German traders and planters—but who, by a most remarkable coincidence, had been named Schwartz.

"I never seen him myself," Jake had drawled to the group of listeners in the shanty bar as he finished this new episode of his oft-recited Odyssey, "but Schwartz, just supposin' you pull up your shirt-tail and let 's have a look?"

Schwartz cursed angrily and stamped out, almost shaking the earth with his bulky tread, while our laughter followed him into the moonlight. All of us thought that Jake had neatly put over an elaborate joke, and Schwartz was not popular.

TAVAU was half-Samoan, and the Samoans are the coquettes of the South Seas. The Tongans themselves—though not quite civilized, or rather Christianized—are a paradox: in wrath they are undoubtedly as fierce as any tribe that touches the Pacific, but their disposition is such as to have won for their group of islands the geographical designation of "friendly."

Tavau was an outrageous flirt for all of her calico wrapper, hymnals and quaint tutoring of native tots in Biblical lore. When anywhere near the missionaries or elder converts, this precious little hypocrite of seventeen tropical Summers was unsmiling and serious as a nun; but with half a chance she flirted, and for the same reason that a parakeet suns and preens its brilliant feathers.

Tavau knew all of Jake's story, possibly excepting the apocryphal chapter; and she often queried him for infinite details as to her mother and grandparents, though perhaps in her inmost mind she doubted, as some of us did, the entire tale. The Rev. Ollivant and the efficient Miss Rankin solemnly assured her that it was unlikely there was a word of truth in the story. But Tavau, hungering for the legends of her scattered tribe, quested among Jake's memories for more and more details, when, as frequently, she crept to his side in some remote thicket. There she stared wistfully into the shadows while he repeated the old, old tale.

What all else Jake may have talked about to her I do not know; but often he said something like this to me: these missionaries come out here from people that have had two thousand years of the Bible and aren't Christians yet. They expect these heathens to take a bath, put on Mother Hubbards and never again feel the wild blood that can't be got rid of except by a knife that opens their veins and lets it run out.

"Ever see a Christian nigger when the wood drum booms the devil-devil dance? He's just like a good healthy fish that suddenly wakes up and finds he's been sleeping on the beach about ten feet above where the little waves are running along over the sand, whispering and looking for him. And there's the forest, older than the Bible, where every leaf's a tongue chanting the ancient songs—where the ghosts of old cannibal chiefs are darting through the shadows, beating drums and sounding conches that white men can't hear. And we white men—don't we get it so strong that we come tumbling out of the cities, forget the prayers learned in the cradle, and go knocking about the world?

"It takes mighty little to make a heathen—mighty little in this climate," Jake usually said when bringing one of his ethnological lectures to an end.

II

IT WAS some time before Jake and I realized that we had that afternoon watched the first scene of a little South Sea drama. A few days later a Queensland labor-trader put into Niko short-handed from a little skirmish with reluctant laborers over at Santa

Cruz—the natives there were cannibals, fierce and wary—and Jake was taken on as mate and I went along.

When we came back the village hummed with gossip and rumors.

Buck Rideout was the richest planter on ten islands. He thought missionaries were only one degree removed from witch-doctors, but he was a stern moral man himself and had contempt for "white niggers," as he called the fathers of half-breeds, whether or not there had been a marriage ceremony.

Some of the gossips said that young Rideout had knocked his uncle down in a quarrel over Tavau.

This rumor was founded largely on the fact that Buck Rideout had worn a bandage about his head when he came wrathfully to the Rev. Ollivant and told him that if he did not keep that young Mary-preacher from his nephew there would be one female less to *sing-sing* at prayer-meeting.

However, regarding the cause for the bandage, some—the less scandal-loving on the island—said that a ripe coconut had fallen on his head.

Anyway, he came to complain of Tavau, and her name was bandied on the beach.

"They've got her locked up tighter 'an a clam in its shell and they're after sendin' her off on the missionary ship that's due next month," one fellow indignantly explained to me. "Just as though ever' girl in the parish back up there where they make missionaries don't go for a moonlight stroll with some lad that likes her and her him."

We who loafed on the beach were what is called in some quarters pretty "broad-minded;" and in our indignation nobody referred to the fact that converted native girls are forbidden to go out after sundown, and that Tavau had resorted rather fluently to pious lies to get out—saying she was to visit a sick sister-Christian or to tell Bible stories to a doubting household. And not once did I hear anybody suggest that both the Rev. Ollivant and Miss Rankin were painfully aware of the ease with which white men parted from native girls, and that the missionaries might really be on the watch-out for Tavau's comfort of mind as well as security of soul.

True enough, young Rideout was not a beach-comber, trader, or even a planter. He was just a stripling of twenty or thereabout, full of the curious impulses and strange intensities of youth, who had come out to live with his bachelor uncle and, eventually, to inherit the plantation.

The Rev. Ollivant had only past experiences to guide him; and among those had never been such a figure as this boy, who was neither fugitive, adventurer nor tourist.

Some man who wrote a book that was left around one time where I had nobody to talk to and nothing else to read, said that from infancy to maturity the human being reflects in a minute way the entire evolutionary history of the race.

I remember only three of his many citations: one was that the new-born infant has strength enough in its tiny fingers to support its weight by clinging to a trapeze, which is a throw-back to arboreal days when our ancestors lived in trees and the babe had to hang on to its mother or drop; another was that the instinctive cruelty of children of about eight to fifteen, their urge to play at fighting and their joy in weapons, reflects the savagery through which the race has passed; and the other, that the extravagant sentimentality and emotional devotion of the youth from around sixteen to twenty when he is in love—as he usually is—attests the shadowy presence in his brain cells of the famous old knights errant who, in the age of chivalry, jousted mightily with their ladies' garter, or veil, or glove, at the lance's haft, and quixotically forswore even principalities to win the smile and hand of some maid who capriciously put them to strange quests and vows.

Young Rideout was not over twenty and I reflected that the knights errant must be holding a magnificent tourney under his cranium if he would crack an ax handle over the head of his uncle, endanger the very valuable plantation, and set the beach gleefully a-roar with his talk of "real love," all because a native girl, who, but for a little less fulness of the lips, was not unlike hundreds back in the bush that danced, howling and naked, in the moonlight feast of cannibals.

But even with all the reports I heard, Jake gathered something more and swore that he believed it, too. However, Schwartz being a German, I knew that Jake would believe anything to his discredit. The report that Jake believed came straight from a reliable source—or as straight as anything ever could come from the mission to the bar shanty.

That is, Ollivant told the native preacher, who was overheard swearing his wife to secrecy by one of the mission girls, who told a boy that she wished to favor, who told his elder brother because naturally he had to tell somebody; and the brother told Jake for a secret drink of gin. That wise law, enforced by the full majesty of British authority, which permits a white man all the liquor on earth if he can get it, but which makes the punishment severe for giving or selling so much as a drop to a native, assures the beach-comber of always having the wherewith to extract favors from black boys.

It seemed that Schwartz, ever with his eyes on Tavau, was quick to suspect that she had tossed her witchery over young Rideout. Schwartz, bulky as an ox and with a beard that was likely to get tangled in the bush at night, had begun soft-footedly to spy on her.

"Him fella Torti," was as near as Jake's informant could manage the German's name; but the rest of the story had come in native dialect, for Jake knew enough native dialects to have filled a half-dozen South Sea dictionaries.

Schwartz had discovered that when Tavau was supposed to be proselyting, or even when supposed to be on her mat asleep, she stole out and met Rideout.

"Instead of doing as anybody but a Deutscher would have done," Jake contemptuously told me, "and have kicked the boy to —— and away from her and sat down hisself, the Deutscher went to Ollivant and says he believes it his duty to inform the missionary of what's going on, because he, Schwartz mind you, is a Christian, though rheumatism don't let him get to church often as he would like. Yes. Schwartz believes in looking out for native morals——"

Jake expatiated most of the night on Schwartz's tale-bearing; and convinced himself while trying to convince me that Schwartz—"Tip'cal Deutscher"—had carried his story to the missionary with a good deal of cunning. Jake said that Schwartz reasoned this way: here is a good chance for me to let the missionary know what a fine Christian gentleman I am; and with Tavau's reputation badly soiled, it will appear magnanimous of me later on to offer to marry her. The missionary will be grateful to me because he will want to be rid of her any way—so she will be pushed right into my arms.

"And," Jake concluded, "what's one marriage more or less to a Deutscher!"

I did not take any stock in Jake's deductions, or in the circumambulated story on which they were based—not until about a week before the mission ship was due, when the shanty bar rang with laughter over the latest and best joke.

How the truth of the matter got out I never knew; but undoubtedly by a relay of native mouths, ending with a drink or two of gin for the last. Anyway the report we heard was as near the truth as anything ever is in the South Seas; and along toward midnight a few of the more reckless fellows made their way to Schwartz's shack and endeavored to offer condolences through the walls of plaited palm leaves.

It seems that Schwartz, knowing that the mission ship on which Tavau was to be sent away would be along soon, saw there was no time to lose, and fitting himself out with some attention to personal appearance, he had gone to the Rev. Ollivant and offered to relieve him of all anxiety as to Tavau's future.

THE missionary could be hoodwinked and taken in by the dullest native, but he knew pretty much about whites. He was ordinarily a gentle, soothing soul, with a hard substratum of stubbornness, however, and a wholly unsuspected ability to express himself in anger.

He had blasted Schwartz with the wrath of the prophets; and, as eminently became his calling, he had spoken nothing but the truth in telling Schwartz that he was a "venomous hypocrite," "a secret-drinking whisky barrel of iniquity," that it were better to lay any girl, native or white, "in her unhallowed grave" than to give her into his "lecherous arms."

And in the course of his comments, however, the Rev. Ollivant disclosed the information that Tavau was not being sent away because she was no longer loved in the mission, or because she was "disgraced"—for she was loved and she wasn't disgraced—but because young Rideout was unreasonably set on marrying her against the wishes and orders of his guardian uncle; but that if Tavau were to be given in marriage to anybody it would certainly be to the young man who had "beseeched" her hand with "the light of purity in his tearful eyes" and a "heart undefiled with beastial lust."

Schwartz had been rather bewildered. It is hard for a German to believe that things can go otherwise than the way he plans that they shall; but it did dawn on him finally that the missionary had answered in the negative, and returning to his shack he had taken to his low-built bed with a bottle of whisky.

The condolence delegation shied a few shells against the matting that served as walls to let Schwartz know that it had arrived.

"Oh, Schwartzy, we come to dance at the weddin' that ain't to be," some one called.

"Too bad, Schwartz, when you took a bath and all that," another contributed.

"Nobody loves a fat man," another fiend chanted, and was loudly corrected by—

"A fat Christian shentleman, you mean."

"Gottdam go vay," Schwartz bellowed, growling and muttering.

A reply was what the condolence delegation wanted; and it jeered, mocked and taunted, goading the big trader into fury.

But this sport soon grew stale: Schwartz only repeated the same oaths and made the same threats, and the tormentors had used up their jibes.

Then somebody with a sense of the dramatic called out convincingly:

"Oh, Schwartz, young Rideout's here. Come on out and congratulate him. Be a sport, come on."

No answer followed, but the muttering stopped behind the mats.

"Rideout says if you don't leave his girl alone he'll tie your heels to the back of your neck and leave you out in the bush," another imaginative fellow added.

A huge, almost naked, bushy-faced white figure burst from the house.

"Vere iss he! Vere iss he?" Schwartz cried, brandishing a large automatic.

"There he is," one of the thoughtless grinning devils shouted, pointing at a sailor who had come along to see the fun, and who had stood discreetly in the back-ground.

At the first shot the sailor—an innocent stranger to our port—went into the air with a yell and came down some fifteen feet away with steam up and sails crowded; and he traveled so fast that, as one of the fellows afterward said, you had to throw your glance about forty feet ahead to see him go by.

Schwartz floundered forward, cursing and shooting drunkenly. He soon stopped for breath and the lack of a target, then blundered back toward his shack, calling upon God to hear his oaths and strike him dead if he failed to cut Rideout's heart away and eat it!

"Uh-huh," said Lean Jake when he heard of it," it takes mighty little to make a heathen. Mighty little in this climate. And that Deutscher got murder in him. Uh-huh."

The missionary ship having run for a week before a gale arrived a day or two sooner than was expected.

That afternoon Lean Jake sat on his sea-chest oiling his long pearl-handled, single-action old revolver; and as usual when caring for the veteran companion of his roaming days, he was oddly silent. It was as though intercourse incommunicable to a third party was passing between them, and despite its years in that land of torpid dampness where metal oxidizes as quickly as clothes mildew, not a fleck or scar of rust was on it.

From time to time he would go to the doorway and view the weather with a seaman's eyes; but he made no comment until I hopefully suggested that it would clear up. He answered—

"You're right—worse luck," and not another word did I get out of him until after sundown when he said casually, "I'm going for a little walk. Maybe a week 'fore I'm back. Maybe more. Maybe a month."

It was a month or so before I really understood, but early the next morning I had my suspicions.

Young Rideout and Tavau had eloped during the night and disappeared into the bush.

There was a great to-do—much running about and searching. Though the drizzle had lasted until around midnight—when a brilliant moon came out—there was not much trouble in finding the trail; but the footprints of the boy and girl had vanished as if by magic after a few miles. The vanishing point, I surmised, was where Jake had met them. Though a sailor and a good one, he was crafty in forest lore; whereas those two children, if left to themselves, would have splashed about miserably all through the night and have been overtaken shortly after sunrise. They would probably never have thought of wading up-stream.

The search was hard and earnest. Buck Rideout offered twenty pounds to whoever found his nephew. The missionaries were as agitated over Tavau as they were over the boy, for though there were no cannibal tribes living back in those hills, canoes full of them frequently blown out of their course arrived from other islands, sometimes from long distances, and held dances and feasts.

A large searching-party started out, some intent on the reward and others enjoying the excitement. The native boys scampered gleefully through the brush; and I did not believe there was one among them who, if he had come upon the fugitives, would not have at once warned and aided them. It might have been different if the boys' minds could have visualized the beads, calico, tobacco, fishing hooks, mirrors and ironware that twenty pounds represented.

The searchers soon split into a score of parties, rushing about in twos, threes and half-dozens; and for the most part having a lark of a time, though the missionaries and Buck Rideout were threatening and entreating.

Near where the trail vanished I suddenly came upon Schwartz arguing earnestly with Iako, a withered old bushman, who, though peaceable enough, held aloof from the "One God" people; but he had come along on the search for the same reason that black boys or white follow the crowd. Iako was not liked by the missionaries—it being reported that he was one of those ancient fellows who made a practise of slipping out through the forest to the hidden and deserted shrines of the old tribal gods. And as I moved by unseen my listening ears caught falling from Schwartz's mouth extravagant promises of tobacco and even brandy for some service or other which I did not hear mentioned.

It was a month before the search stopped. It never really stopped, for to this day I believe boys go slipping through the forest wondering where are the bones of Tavau and her white lover. But in even less than a month the searchers lost hope. Evidence that sent most everybody scampering back out of possible dangers was found of war-parties from savage islands.

Their beached canoes had been seen in the distance from the hill-tops; and though Rideout, Ollivant and some of the missionaries from the ship, with armed and braver natives, later went from one end of the island to the other, they could not come upon either the savages whose canoes had been seen from afar, or traces of the boy and girl. It was supposed that young Rideout and Tavau had been captured and . . . One doesn't think of what happens afterward.

During that time when there was much excitement and so many parties were out for days together, the absence of any one from the village was only casually noticed, if at all, and was no cause for comment.

It was only when the searching was about over, and almost everybody was back and loafing around as usual, that the beach began to wonder what had become of Schwartz and Lean Jake.

Then I awoke one morning and found Jake, who was about as noiseless as a cat anyway, stretched on his bunk.

A labor-recruiting schooner, which did not seem very anxious for Niko's boys, however, had slipped into the harbor during the night; and I judged that Jake had come on her, in view of the fact that she was a stranger and could not have got a pilot until morning. She would have had to wait outside if there had not been somebody on board who knew the reefs and channels as well as Jake did.

It was some time before I could get him to talk. For days he wandered off or sat around meditatively smoking, sometimes staring out across the sea at the strange schooner, sometimes standing with arms folded behind him and looking into the shadowy depths of the forest that climbed up and up until it crested the mountains.

On the fourth morning the recruiting-schooner stood out to sea. Jake watched her out of sight, then called to me.

III

I NEVER knew Lean Jake to tell a lie that I wouldn't have readily told myself; but I have sometimes felt that his sense of the dramatic in his narratives was never embarrassed by what actually happened. Judge for yourself:

Tavau had sent him a note several days before the missionary ship had arrived, saying that she and Rideout would elope and take to the bush the first night that the ship put into the harbor. She knew that it would be gone again in a few days and would not return for three months. In the name of Namoo, her grandmother, to whom Jake forty years before had given a fighting allegiance, she invoked his help—and got it. Jake had already taken a strong fancy to the boy, and always he had been Tavau's slave.

As I had surmised, he arranged to meet them at a point where the trailers could not possibly associate his footprints with theirs. They entered a stream and waded for miles and hours until reasonably sure of having evaded pursuit because the natives—all except the bushmen who are rarely found except on the larger islands—are not adepts in forest lore. Then the little party struck out over a pig trail.

At first Tavau had drawn the calico wrapper high and tucked it around her waist to be out of the way of her legs; but it kept getting loose, so she tore it off and wound it into a short *lava-lava*. When the moon came out she snatched a handful of scarlet flowers from an hibiscus and stuck them into her hair. Then from somewhere in her memory there stirred the old tribal songs of war and love that Naima, her mother, had chanted to her from the time she first lay crooning on a mat; and as the moon lifted itself to the dome of the sky, she rushed into a grassy open space and leaped about, swaying her body and throwing her hands to the rhythm of the wild songs.

Rideout stood and watched her. He had never seen anything like it. Then the magic of the moon, of youth and love and the joy of having her at last, loosened his bashfulness before Jake, and he began to sing out and playfully to sway the ax he carried—"to build their nest with back in the bush," he had told Jake. He tried to catch her, and soon he was leaping about and whooping almost as madly as she.

Around and around they circled and spun, wild with youth and love, and instinctively celebrating their joy in that same bounding play and rhythmic shouting that no doubt startled the newly-created animals in the forests of Eden when the father and mother of us all first awoke and found themselves alive. Then tired, exhausted, they sprang at each other with open arms; and they sank to the grass, gripped in a mutually tense embrace, and lay panting with mouth against mouth.

" 'T was safe as any place for the night," Jake explained, "and they was too tired for the damp to hurt 'em, so I got in a dry spot under a banyan and dozed off."

The next morning the boy and girl said that they were too stiff and sore to move, and coaxed Jake to let them rest in the warm sun; so, knowing that the searching-party had not had time to get within range of the sound, he shot a pig for breakfast, and the first word that popped from Tavau's laughing lips as he brought it in was "*bokolo*"—instantly with her warning eyes she told Jake not to let the boy know what it meant. "Long pig" is a cannibal's Anglicized euphemism for human flesh, and "*bokolo*" is the native's word for the same thing.

Tavau threw away the drab, wet, torn calico and wove herself a heavy garland of leaves—a kind of *lava-lava;* and when Jake left them to climb a peak nearby and scan the coast on the opposite side of the island from the village, she was making fun of Rideout's mud-spattered, torn, stained, white duck trousers, and her nimble fingers were busy on a *lava-lava* of pandanus leaves—for him!

When Jake came back Schwartz lay on the grass, his head cleft to the chin, and the boy, naked but for the girdle of leaves about his loins, was squatting over the bloody ax and staring dully at the dead man.

Tavau vainly petted and praised and scolded, but the boy's brain was numbed: the knowledge of what he had done overpowered and stupefied that unhardened, sensitive mind, schooled ancestrally for a thousand years in the commandment—"Thou shalt not kill."

Iako was squatting beside him, grinning ecstatically with bared toothless gums, and cackling praise.

"Im fella stop along palienti goot *kaikai*," the old savage shouted at Jake, and pointed to the corpse.

He had suggested that one horrible, and nearly unmentionable thing that makes the blood of even the most evil white man run cold—*kaikai* is to eat!

Jake would have killed Iako on the spot—

and came near to doing it—if Tavau had not begun to pour out the story which told how that grinning old savage had, after all, really saved Rideout's life. Iako had explained it all to her.

Schwartz had hired Iako to trail them down for him, and had made no secret of the hope to kill Rideout on sight. Precious little Iako cared whether one white man killed another. Schwartz had promised big pay in terms that Iako could understand, and the old bushman had merely followed up-stream, mile after mile, until his sharp eyes found their trail leaving the water as he had known he must find it eventually if he did not overlook the markings. And a bushman overlooks nothing.

But as they sneaked upon the boy and girl, Iako had heard Tavau chanting one of the old, old fetish songs; and coming closer he had seen Rideout leaping about as Iako himself had leaped before many a maiden in the long ago. He was an exile, a lonesome outlander among the Christianized natives of Niko, and the thought had burst within his head that if the "One God" people took converts from natives, maybe the old gods that he still worshiped could be restored to power and prestige by taking converts from the whites.

Schwartz, evidently aware that he was a poor shot, seemed intent on creeping as close as he could before firing.

Iako suddenly jerked the gun from his hand and screamed a warning, at the same time darting away and attempting to shoot Schwartz. But it was a bewitched weapon —an automatic with an unreleased safety, of which the old savage knew nothing.

Schwartz was badly frightened and had started to run, but when Tavau tauntingly leaped near him, he had turned, snatched up a heavy stick cut for the fire and dashed at Rideout.

The boy, who never in his life had had other than a playground fight, stood helpless, aghast; but Tavau sprang between them and tugged at the powerful German's arm.

Schwartz shifted the club and held her, passionately pulling her up to his bearded mouth.

She screamed.

Then young Rideout wildly caught up the ax and struck.

In her struggles against Schwartz, Tavau had torn the shirt from his breast; and as he lay on the grass there was exposed on his right side, just below the ribs, a long, uneven scar as though—years before—a jagged weapon had torn at his abdomen.

Jake hurried them away as soon as possible, not because he was afraid they would be found—for only an accident, or eyes sharp as Iako's could bring any one to that particular spot—but because he had sighted a canoe on the distant beach; and besides he felt that the boy would go mad if he stared much longer at the dead man.

THAT night Jake left Rideout, who was even then a little out of his head, and Tavau well back in the bush while he and Iako crept forward in the moonlight to see who had come in the canoe and what they were doing.

It was pretty near as he had suspected and exactly as he had guessed when Iako's sharp eyes identified the gorged, sleeping figures lying about on the beach as tribesmen from an island slightly east of Niko who held an inveterate grudge against the Santa Cruzians. A big raid had been made on Santa Cruz and scores of prisoners taken from the Quosoli tribe; but a heavy gale coming up on the trip home, the fleet of war-canoes had been scattered, and the warriors in this one, dashed from their course and hungry, had put in at the northwestern shore of Niko to hold a feast.

Prisoners had evidently been plentiful, for six were left alive, securely tied, and stretched in a row, while about them the food-drunken guards slept like the rest of the war-party.

Iako and Jake cut the prisoners loose; then with difficulty convinced them that it was dangerous to try to slaughter the sleeping enemies that would be aroused if a single blow wounded instead of killed.

Tavau and Rideout were brought down to the canoe which was shoved off without so much as a yell from the stranded warriors who, anyway, were likely enough picked up in a day or two by other members of the scattered war-fleet.

The Quosoli, a bad lot themselves, made straight for home; and a favorable wind helped them along. Jake remained awake most of the time, alertly on watch, for though the Quosoli said that they were grateful a Quosoli is likely to say many things that he does not mean.

Tavau was frantic with worry over

Rideout who sat for hours on hours with an idiotic stare in his eyes. She argued and scolded, and like a true maid of the South Seas, was unashamed to show before the crew how intensely she loved the boy.

Commandeering what mats there were to make him comfortable, seizing the nearly empty bamboo water-pipes and telling the thirsty crew to drink out of the ocean, she fussed over him like a mother over a sick baby. And all the while she drew wonderful pictures of the idyllic life they would live in the bush of Santa Cruz; and sometimes at night, when the air was cool, stirred a flicker of response with her caresses and buoyant words.

Also hour after hour old Iako sat clucking and chattering, happy to be among people who worshiped gods that could be seen and talked to, and not a vague Fellow topside the sky bowl.

They reached the island of the Quosoli, whose village sets at Bundy Bay—Bloody Bay, it is often called, and which in spite of the massacres that had taken place was often visited by labor-recruiters.

The party no sooner landed than the savages, brandishing spears and seven-foot bows, wanted to eat the foreigners, black and white; but the returning Quosoli explained to a little wizened old chief whose mummy-like chest was covered by the insignia of rank—a white disk, large as a dinner-plate, cut from a giant clam shell—and he took them as his guests. That is, he took all except Iako, whom, so Jake thought, they promptly carried off and cooked, for he was not seen again; and that night a big feast was held for the returned warriors.

Moreover, Tonogo, the chief's eldest son, a stalwart fellow twice his father's size with a stone ring big as a doughnut through his nose, came around smacking his greasy lips and staring amorously at Tavau while he proffered a revolting hunk of steaming meat on a tray of fresh plantain leaves. Jake said that he could tell by the odor that it wasn't pork.

Tavau merely ignored him at first, then as he persisted, tearing away a piece of the meat with his fingers and pressing it against her mouth, her temper flared and she angrily told him to go away. But her blazing anger only made her the more beautiful, for her bare breast heaved and the bright eyes snapped as her head was thrown back haughtily.

Tonogo grinned, dropped the piece of meat into his own mouth and stared admiringly while he leisurely chewed on it.

He turned to Jake and said in the wretched patois that natives conceive as being English:

"Bimeby me fella *kaikai* Englis fella. Make Mary stop along Tonogo. You fella stop along him."

And having some humor in him he laughed, but not pleasantly, for he evidently meant what he said, *i. e.*, that when the time came and he got ready, he would kill the boy, Rideout, and Jake, too, then take the girl.

Rideout was sick and fairly out of his head. Tonogo could see that. He went away, then came back with a witch-doctor whom Tavau would not let get within an arm's length of the boy—not even when the old chief himself, strangely solicitous over his guest, appeared and assured her that this particular witch-doctor held high powers of life and death.

"Which was pretty much so," Jake said, "for there be no slicker poisoners than the Quosoli devil-devil doctors."

Jake surmised that the old chief was cunningly hospitable to them because he, the chief, had reason to believe that a British gunboat was coming along in the slow but angry way that British gunboats have of coming after a missionary has been killed; and Jake gathered from words dropped here and there that a new missionary had—as usual among the Quosoli—been killed some three months before, but that the chief hoped the "Government" would believe he had died of dysentery, especially if two white men were found alive and well treated in the tribe.

The Quosoli are dirty, treacherous, amazingly cunning, and as ugly-faced as a race of poisoners are likely to be. They are notoriously inveterate cannibals, filthy and lazy; and on the first night Jake overheard Tavau praying impatiently in English to the "One God" to make her boy well so she could have him, and to send plenty hell-fire and like-Job-boils on the dirty witch-doctor that brought crushed spiders in a skull bowl to smear the sick boy with; and very emphatic was her request that a similar visitation plague Tonogo, who had squatted around talking love while she sat fanning the feverish face of the boy that had her heart. She further called attention to the fact that this was a no-good island and that she wanted plenty quick to get off it.

The next morning she told Jake the same thing. She was sure that the boy was going to die if he did not get away. There was also much more dangerous than mere illness, to be feared; but he was worse, too—he was weak and crazy as a bat.

Tonogo came around and grinningly touched the ringlet of hair he had twisted with fiber cord so that it dangled stiffly down the side of his face, and he said something which Jake did not catch. But Tavau turned almost pale.

The twisted ringlet indicated that between midnight and dawn Tonogo had taken an inexorable vow, one that he could never forget with that ringlet dangling remindingly against the side of his face; one that he must accomplish or perish in the attempt. And the ringlet could never be cut until the vow was fulfilled.

Tavau did not send him away that morning. He squatted beside her and talked. She laughed a few times. Flies settled undisturbed on Rideout's face as she looked half-smilingly into Tonogo's. The next morning they went off together and were gone most of the day.

Jake said that the savage in her just oozed out and covered her from that time on.

The following night there was another feast—a stray bushman had been caught—and against Jake's urging, Tavau decked herself out in flowers and threaded shells and joined the dancing girls.

After that Jake heard no more prayers to the "One God," nor further complaints about the no-good island, and she was the wildest heathen on the beach; though occasionally she would rush in with Tonogo, glowering, at her heels and stroke Rideout's face for a moment, begging him to recognize her.

Jake said it was a clever play to heighten Tonogo's jealousy—and it did.

Jake tried to guard Rideout night and day, even picking out the green cocoanuts from which he drank lest Tonogo, aided by the witch-doctor, might poison the boy. If a missionary could die of "dysentery" after being brained by a war club, why not this stranger if he passed out quietly under the witch-doctor's charm? Jake would still have been left to show the "Government" that the Quosoli did not harm white men.

* * *

BUT a labor-recruiter put into the bay before the gunboat. The skipper was new to the South Seas, but he was careful, as most men had to be in those days if they grew old; and he did not come on shore at all, but parleyed with the disarmed natives on his deck when they swarmed into the roped-off quarters.

The old chief firmly refused to let Jake go on board or even go down to the beach where he might be seen from the ship; and a guard, headed by Tonogo himself, was put over the hut. Rideout could hardly stand on his feet so there was little fear of his getting in range of the white man's magic eyes—binoculars. Tavau could go where she pleased.

Tonogo, as if to make assurance doubly sure regarding Jake, sent him and the guard back into the bush and clear out of sight of the village.

Jake was certain that he would find Rideout dead when he returned, for it seemed too favorable a chance for Tonogo to overlook. But Jake knew there was no possibility of evading the watchful savages. He propped himself against a palm bole and sat there motionless until late in the afternoon, when another party of warriors joined that which had squatted suspiciously around him. Then he was told to get up and come with them; and as though afraid that he might make trouble, several of the savages took the pains to keep their spears near his back.

They rushed him along the neck of land circling the harbor, ordered him into a canoe and made him lie down; then set out frantically for the schooner which was getting under way. He could get no answers for his questions, though he knew very well that somebody was fooling with the orders of the old chief who had not wanted the labor-recruiters to think white men could live overnight among the Quosoli. He wanted the gunboat to think so; but labor-recruiters were discouraged in every way.

The schooner hove to and waited.

The skipper, looking over the side, showed no surprise at seeing a white man in the bottom of the canoe.

As soon as Jake went over the ladder the skipper explained that he had only pretended to stand out to sea to make the "niggers hurry and fetch you," adding that the sick white boy was already on board—thereby drawing a volley of questions from the amazed Jake.

The skipper said that Tavau and a big buck with a green bracelet hanging from his nose, and a pigtail of wool bobbing down the side of his face, had been out to the schooner that morning, and wanted to know if he, the skipper, would take away two white men.

The skipper said that "nothing but an affidavit from a priest" would make him really believe that two white men were alive on the island; but the girl had spoken English quite clearly, and judging from her unusual beauty and the jealous eyes of the big nigger, she spoke pretty much the truth. The skipper said that she had laughed and affectionately patted the big black's arm from time to time as he stood by her, listening watchfully, but unable to catch more than a word here and there, if even so much.

Tavau told the skipper that Tonogo, son of the chief, had vowed to have her as his woman or kill the two white men; but that he was willing to let them escape if she married him because the old chief would make a roar if they were killed, but not quite so big a roar if they escaped—which seemed to the skipper, from all he had heard about the island, a complete reversal of Quosoli psychology.

Tavau said that she loved both white men: the lean one because he had been good to her grandmother, from which the skipper—much to Jake's disgust—got the impression that Jake had given the old lady plenty of tobacco in her toothless dotage; but that she loved the young, handsome one because "he was him" and it couldn't be helped, but that he was terribly bad off now and was going to be worse off if he got well; therefore it was all right to marry Tonogo plenty-quick, which wasn't so bad in a way because he would soon be chief, and she could always kill him if he wasn't good to her—but he would be, for, as the skipper could see, he had a kind, handsome face.

And the skipper said to Jake that it was only something that he didn't quite understand in the girl's eyes that kept him from laughing outright: he swore that for an instant he saw tears there; but Jake scornfully told him that when he had been below the line forty-odd years he would know that heathens never shed tears, not even when they cried all night. The skipper finally compromised with the suggestion that maybe it was tobacco smoke or something that had got in her eyes for a moment, for after all it couldn't have been real tears because she laughed right away after she said it.

She had done another queer thing too, for though she spoke English almost like a white girl, she had lapsed into the trader's argot, understood by natives from the Solomons to the Carolines, to tell the skipper that she did not like the "One God" any more because she had prayed to Him, and Tonogo had had the witch-man do his praying to the Quosoli gods; and they were the more powerful, for hadn't he got what he asked for, and she failed, so that now she loved Tonogo very much?

Then as she and the big buck started to leave the ship she had asked the skipper for his knife; and he gave it to her, thinking she wanted it as a present—the natives are always begging something or other—but she took it and quickly cut off the dangling pig-tail of hair on the big buck nigger's head, and Tonogo had grinned approvingly. Then she offered the knife back to the skipper, who, however, told her to keep it, and they climbed over the side into the waiting canoe and shoved off.

Broth and medicine from the ship's chest brought Rideout around to a bit of strength and his senses in a few days, but he could not forget Schwartz at any hour of the day or night, though he did not remember hardly anything after the fight up in the hills.

He wanted Tavau.

He would not be quiet when he found that she was not on the ship, and nearly went out of his head again when Jake told him how Tonogo had roused the wild blood in her so that she had gone right back to devil-devil dancing and idol-worship like her wild grandmothers before her.

"I always thought Tavau was different," Jake said tenderly to the boy. "I did for a fact. But being forty-odd years down here I ought t' have known better. Once a heathen, always a heathen—and her having such a grandmother and mother. Anyhow it takes too long for religion to soak through black skins and get down where it does a lot o' good. It's been soaking in the hides of us whites for two thousand-odd years and it ain't reached all our hearts yet. But it's live and learn, my boy—an' learnin' costs a lot o' brainaches and unweeped tears—'specially in this climate.

"Now Schwartz was just a drunken Deutscher. Just pretend I killed him. I'd a-done it and with joy, so don't let that worry you none. And Tavau—she was just a nigger, and she fooled us all just like women does no matter what their color is."

A labor-trade, or recruiting, schooner travels pretty much to suit itself; and the skipper dropped some two hundred miles off his course to bring Jake and Rideout to Niko.

But Rideout did not come on shore.

Jake had gone over and had a talk with the uncle; and Buck was mad and had a good deal to say; but, all things considered, he agreed with Jake that it was best for Niko not to learn what had happened, and after Buck had gone on board to see the boy he thought maybe the boy would be just as well off with a cousin back in Liverpool who had wanted to bring him up in his business. And Buck made arrangements with the skipper to see that the boy got to Sydney from where he could take a boat home.

IV

THAT was the story as Jake told it to me.

But a few days later a British gunboat put into Niko, after a visit to Bloody Bay over in the Santa Cruz group.

The sailors that gathered at the shanty bar said that they had not shelled the village because they found that the missionary hadn't been killed at all, but had died of dysentery—just like lots of fool missionaries do, and then their friends make a howl to the Government and say cannibals ate 'em.

Why, the sailors had found the Quosoli the friendliest tribe anywhere. True, their experience with natives was not great because their gunboat had only recently been sent into the South Seas for duty, but they guessed they knew when even niggers were friendly.

But a funny thing had happened a day or two before they got there. The pretty young wife of the chief's son had killed herself—driven a knife right into her heart, and everybody in the tribe was afraid to touch her body—funny thing—because never in the memory of the oldest man in the tribe had a woman done that—killed herself, you know; and there she lay, right on the mat in a new hut the chief's son had just built—still beautiful, she was, though two days dead in that climate.

A party from the gunboat had given her a decent burial; and the captain had said a prayer because he was a religious man and believed heathens had souls. Moreover, he had been overheard saying to his first officer that anybody could see that she was different from the Quosoli women. But none of the natives would talk about her, or where or how or when she came, because she was *tapoo*—a woman who had killed herself.

And the sailors, drinking there in the shanty bar, appealed to Jake to know if in his forty-odd years he had ever heard of such a thing before.

But Jake, staring dully straight ahead of him, got up and went out into the night, and did not answer.

A New Keeper of the Wampum

by Hugh Pendexter

DeALTON VALENTINE

Author of "An Express from Ligonier," "The Skidi Feed the Evening Star," etc.

JIM CAMERON, a blond giant of a man, whose reputation as a forest-ranger was second only to that of Jo Martin's, rested on one elbow in the sweet June grass and surveyed his long, powerful limbs complacently. As his gaze shifted to Martin, his companion on many a scout, his mouth twitched with a little smile, then hardened. Martin, slight of build and several inches under Cameron's stature, sat with his lithe body curving forward over his knees and was staring at the toes of his moccasins. His dark features wore an expression of deep dejection.

All day the two had lounged about the Blanchard cabin, standing guard till Blanchard returned from the little mill at Devens Farms. Inside the open door Betty Blanchard tossed her pretty head as she helped her mother, and proudly told herself there was not another girl on all the New York frontier in this Summer of 1778 who could boast two such cavaliers.

Both men knew the girl was a coquette and loved her the more distractedly for the tantalizing fault; and both inwardly vowed their loitering should end once Blanchard returned. For with the father to act as intermediary the girl would be brought to book and announce her choice. Border wooings were bruskly terminated at times in these stirring days, when Sir Henry Clinton was retreating from Philadelphia to New York with General Washington at his heels. "Big Cameron" was confident the girl was as good as his wife. Martin believed the same, but would not withdraw until told as much by the maid.

"Think I'll scout up Oriskany way again. Ain't been there since we had the brush with the Mohawks," lazily remarked Cameron after a long silence. "Go along?"

Before the girl came between them this question would not have been put; each taking it for granted the two of them must follow the same trail.

"Don't think so," jerkily replied Martin without lifting his head. "Mebbe I'll drift out Mich'limack'nac way."

Cameron's pleasant face clouded for a moment: he and Martin had had some rare old times together. Of course old ties must loosen when a ranger settled down with a wife. But, Lord, how the trail would call him in the years to come. Then he caught a flutter of Betty's skirts as she switched by the door and he could only think of the maid. Another period of silence, and then both men were on their feet, bowing and scraping, only to find it was the mother and not the girl. Mrs. Blanchard smiled and the girl snickered inside the cabin.

"Look after Betty while I go up to Cotton's," said Mrs. Blanchard. "Don't let the Injuns carry her off."

"The whole Iroquois League can't harm a hair of her head," cried Big Cameron.

"I reckon she'll be here when you git back," quietly assured Martin.

With a smile for each to show her impartiality Mrs. Blanchard walked up the river trail that led to the nearest neighbor's; and the two men, still standing, looked at each other coldly.

Martin spoke first, saying:

"Cameron, we've followed our last trail together. I'm tired of uncertainties. Let's have it settled."

Cameron dropped into the grass, replying—

"I'm in no hurry."

"I am," grimly retorted Martin; and the face he showed at the door was haggard and determined. "Betty, come here and settle something for us," he peremptorily demanded.

All their words had fed through the small, square hole serving as a window. Perhaps the girl resented Martin's arbitrary tone and manner. Anyway, there were danger signals in her cheeks as she appeared in the doorway and with hands on her hips bent her gaze on the two men. Martin, although usually nonplussed in her presence, desperately requested:

"Which is it, Betsy? Him or me? Let's have it settled and done with."

The girl's eyes snapped ominously and she coldly returned—

"Lor'! Jo Martin; I never knew anything had been commenced."

"Mebbe not. That means two fools 'stead of one. But here's Cameron, who I fetched here last Winter. Here's me; who's been coming here for a year every chance I could git. Which one's wasting his time? Say which shall stop coming."

"I never asked either of you to come here," she slowly answered. "Quite a few forest-rangers go up and down the Schoharie and stop to see us. The trail's open at both ends for them that want to come—for them who're keen to go."

Cameron chuckled. Martin's dark face grew hot and he declared—

"Well, the trail's closed for me unless you say for Jim Cameron to stay away."

Oblivious to the fact a new world was being created from the primeval solitudes, that the destiny of a continent was being indexed by such sturdy characters as they, the girl braced her slender shoulders and sharply informed:

"It'll never be for you, nor no man, to say who shall come and who shall keep clear of Blanchard's. Mister Cameron has more sense than to talk that way."

"Cameron," choked Martin, his eyes growing lurid under the taunting smile of the big fellow. He checked himself with difficulty and muttered, "so it's Cameron, eh? Three's a crowd. I'll be going."

"But, Jo, you're acting silly," she protested as he turned away. "Ain't Jim Cameron always been your friend? Can't you see it's wicked for you two to fall out this way?"

"I ain't doing any falling out," defended Cameron, feeling a trifle uneasy at the thought of walking the forests alone after all the years of Martin's companionship.

Over his shoulder Martin passionately shot back:

"He was my friend till I fetched him here. He knew how I felt. But that didn't bother him any once he'd seen you."

"If you're going to look at it that way, Jo Martin, why should anything bother me?" cried Cameron. "Think you can go through the world and blaze trees what take your liking and expect folks not to touch 'em even if you can't chop 'em down? Now you've put a name to it, I'll say that since I seen Betty nothing else can ever count."

Martin made no response, but dropped his long rifle across his left arm and hurried up the trail, his cup of misery overflowing.

THE gracious warmth of the June sun could not dispel the blighting paralysis from the valleys of the Mohawk and Schoharie. Only the Blanchard and Cotton families remained in this section, and they had been repeatedly warned to fall back to the settlements.

Aside from their Anglo-Saxon tenacity to start a harvest the seasonal assurance of fecundity found no crops planted. No hopeful husbandmen were plying the advantage of the month. From Fonda's Bush to the eastern waters of the Susquehanna a strange apathy rested on the land; and fields grew rank with trash, orchards blossomed with no chance of being harvested, while spiders spun webs in the doorways of abandoned homes.

Dread of the Iroquois had put a stop to all peaceful pursuits along the border. Fear of the Long House and their white allies had brought a hush to the country; and only those were abroad who fought for or against King George upon his throne. Mothers quieted their children's whimpering by whispering the one word "Iroquois."

Troublous times. A strange time for wooing a maid, with the brooding calm more wearing on men's nerves than the crash of actual battle. The few border folks who dwelt outside the forts, such as the Blanchards and Cottons, might well tremble of nights and expect to hear the pattering reconnaissance of the red men, followed by their horrible screams as they sounded the doom of their victims.

According to Martin's views, however, the times were not out of joint. He was accustomed to these waves of terror. Settlers alternately flocked to their little farms and fled in terror to the nearest garrison post. Indians always had been a factor in the ranger's life and their depredations could scarcely interfere with flights of amiable fancy.

Now he was flogged on by one wild desire; to leave the country and in new regions and amid new perils strive to forget. His mind boiled with rage at Cameron, and he cursed the Winter's day he had led the giant to the Blanchard cabin. Prior to that Betty had been glad enough to see him. He was enraged at the girl, too, for playing with his love. If Cameron had been wiped out in that last fight on the Oriskany—but that was too evil a thought, especially seeing it was useless.

He had been an hour on the trail when the pounding of hoofs ahead aroused him from his black thoughts. He drew aside, dully wondering who might be riding so hard and fast. With an exclamation of alarm he jumped to the middle of the trail and raised his hand for her to stop; for it was Mrs. Blanchard. She pointed behind her and gestured for him to run back; and there was the glare of insanity in her eyes.

Behind her ran one of the Cotton boys, striving to cling to the stirrup, and his face was ghastly with fright. As Mrs. Blanchard swept by, screaming something the ranger did not catch, the boy tripped and sprawled at his feet. On swept horse and rider.

Yanking the boy to his feet Martin shook him fiercely and stilled his blubbering. When he could speak the lad gasped:

"Iroquois! Devens Farms! The miller and Blanchard killed. Miller's hired man made our cabin and fetched the word. Our fambly's started for the settlement. Father give Mrs. Blanchard the hoss to git home. I'm to go with 'em. The red hellions will be along any minute."

He broke off and with a faint scream pointed up the trail, then turned and scuttled off.

Martin beheld a shaft of smoke slowly rising above the forest crown. The Iroquois had reached the Cotton clearing and were at work. The tragedy made him forget his own troubles. Blanchard dead! It seemed impossible. He always had liked the man. He carefully selected a position on the river-bank and slipped several bullets into his mouth. They would come down the trail and if he could hold them back a bit Mrs. Blanchard and Betty would stand a good chance of escaping.

The volume of smoke increased and he thought the faint breeze brought on its fragrant breath the sound of triumphant yells, but it might have been the murmuring of the river. Minutes passed, each sixty seconds adding to the fugitives' security, then with much awkward plunging a cow came down the trail, behind her ran two savages, their painted faces making them devils. Martin picked off the rearmost with a ball through his shaven head, but before he could reload and bag the other a rifle cracked near-by and the fleeing savage crashed on his face.

Martin looked 'round and beheld Cameron reloading.

"The women?" he barked.

"Making east with the boy. They know the way. Thought I could do more good up here."

"You oughter gone with 'em," growled Martin.

"Guess I know what to do when it comes to taking care of Betty," snarled the big fellow.

"You can go to —— after this is over. I never 'lowed to fight by your side ag'in," growled Martin.

Cameron's big face grimaced with rage, then he clicked a bullet against his white teeth and glared up the trail. Now they were coming, a hideous, whooping throng, with the leader wildly brandishing a gray scalp. Martin shuddered and prayed Betty might never see it, and forthwith bowled over the bearer. A second later Cameron brought down another; but instead of holding back, the Iroquois came on, taking a chance, there were but two, and knowing they would not have time to reload.

Martin ducked low and ran toward them, rising and discharging his two pistols into their midst and throwing them into confusion. But Cameron, relying on his great strength, rushed up the open trail, bellowing like a bull and using his rifle for a club and breaking it on a skull at the first swing. An Indian landed on Martin's back and a hand clutched his scalplock. Ducking low he threw his assailant over his head and knifed him just as another warrior dashed into him full-tilt. He glimpsed Cameron going down beneath a mass of savages, then rolled into the river, taking his assailant with him.

MARTIN lay in the bush with his rifle covering the doorway of the Blanchard cabin. He knew Betty and her mother reached Schenectady. He believed Cameron must have died that day in the trail, although he had found no determining proof after searching the woods from Devens Farms to this clearing. While he prowled through forest and deserted farmsteads he had felt guilty of trying on a dead man's shoes. Were he positive Cameron were alive he would have lost no time in making for far-off Michilimackinac. Now the cabin held his attention because he had detected a movement inside. He hoped it might be a straggling Iroquois bent on loot.

Again something stirred inside, and a sudden horror enveloped him. What if Big Cameron had escaped, and, like himself, had wandered back to his sweetheart's home? The girl was in Dutch Schenectady, and if Cameron be alive and here. . . . The ranger tried to push the thought from him, yet all the time telling himself that should the big fellow die on the doorsill of the abandoned cabin it would be charged up to the Iroquois.

He had accepted his loss of the girl as final till after the fight in the trail, when he took it for granted his former friend had gone to his death. Believing that, he had permitted a bit of hope to grow up in his heart. But if intuition were right, and Cameron were here. . . And again he endeavored to retreat deeper into the bush and away from the horrible temptation. Something in his soul shrieked out for him to kill the beastly thought, while louder and louder his mad love dinned in his ears—

"With Cameron dead you may win her."

A figure began drawing toward the doorway and a familiar coonskin cap emerged from the shadows, the cap Cameron wore the day Blanchard was killed. With a loud groan Martin threw down his rifle and clenched his hands and thrust the bloody opportunity from him!

"Who's there?" asked a voice.

With a gasp of incredulity Martin crawled from cover and glared at the pale face and sorrow-filled eyes of Betty Blanchard. And she was wearing the cap Cameron had left behind when he ran up the trail to check the onrush of the Iroquois. Recognizing him she lowered the rifle she had held in readiness, and demanded—

"Jo Martin, where's your friend, Jim Cameron?"

He plucked at the fringe of his hunting-shirt and tried to find words. She continued:

"You two were together the day the Injuns came. Where is he?"

"I don't know. He went down with a dozen on top of him," he dully answered. "Dead, prob'ly. I had troubles of my own 'bout that time."

"He is not dead," she astounded him by informing. "He was taken alive. I want to know where he's held prisoner. He was last heard of at Cayuga Castle."

"At Gayagaanhe!" exclaimed Martin. "Who says that?"

"Black Bear, the friendly Oneida my father saved from freezing two Winters ago. He talked with me in Schenectady. He was carrying dispatches from Colonel Gansevoort at Fort Stanwix. He said one of our Oneida scouts brought the news to Stanwix. He must be rescued. He must be ransomed."

And she sank down in the doorway as though very weak.

"Ransomed? They'd rather have him than all the goods and rum a dozen bateaus could float up the Mohawk."

"He must be freed," she muttered in a peculiar little sing-song. "He fought that mother and me might escape. Black Bear said they would probably take him to Onondaga—for the torture. Oh, that must not be, that must not be! I went to the officers in Schenectady. They could do nothing. So I came here, thinking to find some of our rangers. We have a little store of silver in Albany. We'll give it all gladly to get him free."

He thought rapidly while she was speaking. Had he not met her Cameron would have been done to death at Onondaga without his knowledge, and in the course of time she would learn to welcome his love. Now he believed he must drive a bargain, or lose the one chance.

He looked aside to escape her clear gaze and doggedly began—

"What'll you give to have Cameron rescued?"

"Anything," was the prompt answer.

"Which means nothing but a little silver. See here, Betty, I've hated Cameron ever since he came between you and me. If the Iroquois take him to Onondaga and he still lives there is one small chance for him, providing the man who goes to get him uses the scheme I have in my head and is willing to risk the stake. If that man goes and fails there will be two fires lighted in front of the council-house instead of one."

She shivered at his words and twisted her hands convulsively.

"I can't send a man to his death," she muttered.

"If the price is right for his going and he goes and fails he can't find no fault. It's part of the bargain—the price if he wins."

"I don't understand what you mean."

Still refusing to meet her gaze he hoarsely completed:

"With what I know of Onondaga, coupled to the plan simmering in my mind, I'd stand a better chance of fetching him out then any man I know of. But I have my price. If I git him clear will you forget you ever loved him, and marry me?"

She eyed him wildly for nearly a minute, then whispered—

"You'd—you'd make me marry you even if I liked some one else better?"

His tanned face burned with shame, but he doggedly replied:

"I ain't making any one marry me. We're talking of ransoming Cameron. The Injuns won't dicker. You can ransom him from me. If I fail, you pay no price. I'll take you to Stanwix and you can offer all yours and your mother's silver to the men there for them to go and git him. None will try to earn the price. And Gansevoort will send you down the Mohawk to Schenectady on the first bateau.

"Only three days ago two soldiers were butchered within sight of the garrison. Night and day they prowl about the fort and even our Oneidas keep close to cover. You can reckon how much worse it would be to try and sneak into Onondaga. And yet it might be done—but I know of no man but myself who would try it, let alone doing it. And I don't want your silver."

"You'd make a woman marry you?" she fiercely cried.

The scorn in her voice stung him to greater passion.

"I'd make you," he gritted. "You seemed to like me till I brought him here. Then you picked him. Then you sent me packing. You've had your way, picking and choosing. Cameron would do the same as I if our positions was swapped 'round. Didn't he say that after seeing you that nothing else counted? Well, he's trapped. Why should I risk my hair for the man who's bested me in the only game I ever set my heart on winning?"

"But to take a woman that way!" she moaned.

"If it's the only way, and the woman is you—yes."

"And I'd always hate you for it," she passionately cried. "You ought to feel ashamed enough to die for saying such things to me. You must be mad. I'll go to Stanwix. Surely there'll be one man there, red or white."

"And be sent down the river under guard to your mother. And meanwhile the Iroquois will be roasting Cameron."

"Don't, don't!" she begged, clapping her hands to her face to shut out some vision.

A fury seized upon him as he observed her grief for Cameron. He wanted to punish her for preferring Cameron, and began babbling:

"They'll cut off his finger-nails with clam-shells. They'll make him last for days and——"

She leaped to her feet and clutched him by the wrists, and in a broken voice cried:

"Are you a devil? Mohawk or Seneca? Aye, look away from me and never look at a decent woman again. Listen to me, for you can't stop your ears as you hide your eyes. I'll not go to Stanwix to be sent down the river. I'll go to Onondaga. I'll go after Cameron myself. And if I die, the Iroquois can't be more cruel than you have been."

Her anguish brought him to his senses and his better self. As he stole a glance at her hard, set face a new fear gripped him. She had her father's spirit; and did she determine to enter the gloomy depths of the Onondaga woods no one could prevent her.

"I have been mad," he faintly confessed. "But it was all for love of you, Betty Blanchard. For my poor love for you. I'll go after Cameron—and there shall be no price."

SIR WILLIAM JOHNSON, former Indian superintendent for the Crown and a mighty influence in the Long House, was dead these four years. By dying at the outbreak of the Revolutionary War he had escaped the necessity of making the great decision which the war would have demanded of him. Whether he would have cast his lot with the Royal Government, which had given him his all, or would have swung his red brood to the defense of the colonies he so loved, or would have essayed to hold his fierce children neutral, who can say? He died when the Summer was mellow and warm along the Mohawk, hastened to his grave, his friends believed, by the question ever confronting his soul.

Could his spirit return to his old haunts this Mid-Summer day he would have found to be widely scattered the dusky race that had given gentle names to wood and stream, from the Sacondaga to the Genesee. For more than three centuries the Iroquois were the Romans of the new world, conquering, colonizing and assimilating. And yet not entirely Roman, for there was a suggestion of the Saxon in their federal system of government, their care to prevent a concentration of power, and their efforts to develop the individual, and promote personal liberty. If not for the coming of the white race they would have shared the Western world with the Aztecs.

But the fallen fortunes of the Long House interested Jo Martin none as he stole through the interlacing lights and shadows of the silent forest. That a mighty race was fighting its last fight never dawned upon his intelligence as he scanned the damp forest floor for the imprint of a hostile moccasin. Even had his mind been receptive to philosophical musings he would have deemed it madness to suggest that race, language and history were virtually doomed to extinction within the life of three generations.

The ranger was purely objective. His thoughts refused to quit the girl Betty. His wicked madness had passed from him and he knew it was better for him to join Cameron at the stake than to leave any trick untried. He had behaved monstrously, and only the rescue of Cameron could palliate his offense. He passed near enough to Fort Stanwix to hear the dull *pur-r-r* of a drum, then turned south to avoid the skulking savages he knew were fringing the post. It was not till several miles from Stanwix and well within hostile country that he became conscious of being trailed.

He must have made his discovery subconsciously, for one moment he was flitting down a forest aisle, his heart in an ache for the wrong he had done Betty Blanchard, and the next he was behind a tree. He had heard nor seen nothing that he knew of; yet the moment he was behind the tree he was noiselessly working his way under a tangle of wild-grape vines and rejoicing to find his body slipping down a declivity. Completing the descent he found himself in a little gulley and at once started to run along this.

When he deemed it prudent to emerge from the gulley he took time to wonder why his tracker had not sounded an alarm. As he mulled over this puzzling phase of the situation an Indian brave suddenly stepped before him and raised an empty hand in a token of well-meaning. Before Martin could think to take the defensive his startled eyes noted the painted Oneida totem on the savage's chest, and in great relief asked—

"Why does the Black Bear of the Oneidas follow his white brother?"

"The white girl whose eyes are the color of the cornflower asked the Bear to find the white man who dares walk alone through the Long House. The Black Bear owes a life to the father of the white girl. He met her on the Mohawk. She grows thin like a starved deer, and white, like the first snow. She said find and give this talk to the white man who goes to find the man Cameron."

As he spoke this in the Oneida tongue he produced from his paint-bag a small roll of birchbark tied with a blue ribbon, and Martin's heart skipped a beat at the sight of the ribbon. In accepting it he read the words, "For Jas. Cameron," written with a charred stick on the outside.

"She sends this by me to Cameron?" asked Martin.

"To the man Cameron, who now is held at Onondaga," grunted the Oneida.

He had hardly spoken before he was vanishing into a tangle of bushes. Martin gaped blankly for a moment, the abrupt disappearance preventing various queries he desired to put. A soft *hiss* back of him brought him to the right-about, his hand on his ax. The Black Bear's visage showed for a moment from beneath some underbrush and he was pointing behind the ranger. Martin lost no time in taking his cue to efface himself, but it required several minutes to locate the danger, a dusky form slipping from tree to tree. Farther back were other forms. He had the Oneida to thank for escaping a surprise attack.

Securing the roll of bark in his belt he concentrated all his cunning on escaping. He was convinced there were but a handful of the enemy, else there would have been a loud outcry and an attempt to encircle him. Returning to the gulley he utilized its cover for a hot sprint. When a long drawn-out yell warned him the Iroquois had discovered where he descended to the gulley he climbed the bank and struck off at top speed toward the eastern end of Oneida Lake.

He had now penetrated well behind the mass of warriors surrounding Stanwix and every stride was plunging him deeper into the Iroquois country. But given his liberty until night and he believed the odds were in his favor; for he was on familiar ground and had various hiding-places. It was growing dusk when he caught the soft *lap-lap* of the lake and knew the race was won. At no time during his flight had he glimpsed Black Bear of the Oneida Bear clan.

FOR years a wooden structure known as the Royal Blockhouse stood at this end of the lake. It had withstood many Indian assaults but for more than a decade had been abandoned by troops and left to the elements. The early morning mists were rising in tenuous shapes from the lake, suggesting quadrilles by ghosts, when Martin peered through a loop-hole and studied the silent woods.

Satisfied no enemy was lurking behind the forest screen he passed the open door and its silken barrier of spider-webs and proceeded to the end of the building nearest the lake. Here he removed a section of a log, cunningly prepared for such an emergency, and passed into the sweet air. A thicket of saplings concealed him as he rose to his feet, and the grove extended to the shore of the lake. Stealing to the water the ranger spread his blanket on the ground and disrobed to the waist, hung a trade mirror before him and emptied a paint-bag between his crossed legs.

The brushes of bark he made more pliable by chewing them. Next he mixed his paints and proceeded to transform himself into an aborigine. On his breast he painted a Cayuga totem, a bear standing erect, the clan of the bear being common to the tribes of the Long House. Although he had utilized his cache of paints in the blockhouse more than once for turning himself into a savage it required time and patience to hack off his long hair and partially shave his head. But when he had finished Jo Martin, ranger, was gone and Dancing Black Bear, Cayuga, stood in his place.

Now that he was ready for the final test of his scheme his courage weakened. Not that he feared for himself, for he would have gone to the stake if by so doing he could fully atone for the black thoughts he had harbored. He worried lest the Oneida's intelligence was wrong, and that Cameron had been put to death at Gayagaanhe. The success of his bizarre scheme demanded that his rival be at Onondaga, where the Great Council-Fire ever burned.

So for once his heart grew glad when he discovered Indians approaching from the direction of Stanwix. He knew they were hurrying to Onondaga and that only one errand could call them there—to enjoy the spectacle of a white man put to the torture. As they moved in a course parallel to his and as there was no danger of their crossing his trail he secured a vantage-point and watched them. They were Mohawks, and filed by with the precision of a machine and with no more noise than a snake would make. One warrior carried two scalps stretched on hoops, and the ranger knew these trophies were furnished by the soldiers killed a few days before.

Throughout the long afternoon and under the stars of early evening the painted white man hung to the heels of the Mohawks. When the glow of fires bloomed rosily ahead he knew the great adventure was about to be staged; for he was on the outskirts of dread Onondaga. A loud chorus of welcome was given the Mohawks, and, as though the man Cameron's ordeal had been postponed till this arrival, there next rose a monotonous chanting.

Confident because of his paint and the obscurity of the night Martin glided closer and gained a position near the great bark council-house and crouched in some bushes. The council-house stood on a gentle slope, overlooking the place of torture. An old man, the hereditary keeper of the wampum, stood in the doorway awaiting the spectacle, his slight figure sharply outlined by the flaming torch in the wall behind him.

Groups of warriors were congregating near the torture-stake and the ring of fire surrounding, but not touching it. This flaming circle contained the calendar of Cameron's mortal life; for the ranger knew his rival would be brought forth when the dancing fire had subsided into beds of coals.

Leaving his long rifle in the brush, Martin dropped his blanket from his shoulders and allowed it to hang from his loins. Then he struck boldly into the open. The Mohawk who carried the scalps taken at Stanwix gave him greeting, which the ranger returned and passed on. The Mohawk, without suspecting the truth, was impelled to follow him. Martin discerned this much and came to a halt as though waiting to enjoy the preliminaries. Every nerve was strung as taut as the cord of a war bow as he fancied himself in danger of discovery even before he could fairly enter upon his project.

He had no time to give to finesse if he were to make a try for Cameron's life, for already the flames were shortening and the ridge of coals climbing higher. Groups of the various tribes were steadily growing larger, Seneca, Onondaga, Cayuga and Mohawk. Now the groups extended and came in contact, forming a large and compact body. Wizened hags were coursing back and forth in a frenzy of blood-lusting and contributing the only note of impatience.

"He killed my son at Oriskany! Let me fondle him! Let me play with him!" shrieked the leader of the witch band.

The cry was caught up and tossed about with fiendish gusto. Despite the warmth of the night Martin felt chilly, for he had been with Cameron at Oriskany.

The warriors held themselves in dignified restraint, although their eyes glittered brightly as dry fuel was thrown on various fires to illuminate the scene. Martin searched the assemblage closely and was relieved at not beholding Walter Butler, tutelary devil to the Senecas. A warrior beside the ranger grunted loudly and smacked his lips in satisfaction.

Following the direction of his gaze Martin trembled at beholding the tall, superb figure of Cameron advancing through an aisle of warriors, stripped to the buff, his arms fastened behind his back. His blond head was held high, but the dew of death glistened on his forehead. That his eyes narrowed at sight of the stake and ring of coals discredited his manhood none. Two warriors walked beside him, holding him by the arms to prevent his drawing back. With a sudden twist of his massive shoulders he shunted these aside, and with steady step continued his approach.

"Ho! Ho!" resounded in approval from many throats.

"A man comes to die!" cried an aged chief.

"Ho! Ho! A man comes to die!" The fierce shout rolled down the valley and through the black arches of the forest.

The Mohawk with the scalps pressed forward to obtain a better view of the entertainment. Martin edged toward the council-house. Again the Mohawk felt a vague misgiving tainting his pleasure, and he took a step after the masquerader. Whereat Martin gutturally cried:

"Ho! Ho! We owe the brave man thanks!"

The Mohawk halted and resumed watching the prisoner. As a preface to the more exquisite torture a young brave seized one of Cameron's hands and thrust a finger deep into the bowl of a lighted pipe. With no betrayal of pain the prisoner stared complacently over the heads of his captors for a moment, then kicked out behind him and hurled his tormentor into the coals.

Yells of joy greeted the warrior's discomfiture, as gasping for breath he crawled from the fiery mass like a scorched snake. Martin felt a twinge of the old comradeship warm his blood; and within himself he muttered—

" 'Fore God, he's a brave man!"

"Ho! Ho! A brave man comes to die

the death of brave men!" shouted the savages; and axes were held aloft in honorable salute to the victim.

Martin dropped back and passed through the outer circle.

He was safe from all eyes except those of the Mohawk. The latter could not rid himself of the feeling that the Cayuga was acting in a peculiar manner in withdrawing from the delectable spectacle. Martin, however, could not afford to waste another minute; and being in the shadows he ran swiftly to the rear of the council-house. He knew the Mohawk was following him but did not stay his steps till at the end of the shed, in which the Onondagas stored their Winter's wood and war supplies for the league.

"Why does my brother come here when a man is about to die?" challenged the Mohawk, placing a heavy hand on Martin's shoulder.

With a swing of his ax Martin felled him lifeless, and grunted:

"Right, my nosey friend. A man has died."

Rolling the body under a bush he entered the shed and after stumbling over some logs found what he knew was always stored there. Picking up a keg he groped through the darkness to the door opening into the council-house. Throwing this back he sped down the long passageway till he reached the edge of the torch-light. There he deposited the keg on the floor. The keeper of the wampum sensed his presence, and, turning, discovered him.

"Go out!" the sachem angrily commanded. "You can not bring rum here." And pointed to the keg. "Has the Cayuga's ears grown so thick he never heard that the wampum of the Six Nations is kept here?"

Martin bowed meekly before the rebuke and picking up the keg advanced as though to leave by the front door, only on reaching the door he quickly closed it. Stupefied by such behavior the aged guardian blinked foolishly for a few moments, then sought to cry out. A blanket dropped over his head and smothered him. He was dazed by the time Martin finished tying him up. The ranger next knocked the head from the keg, then taking the torch began searching the various apartments opening off the central passageway. In the third room he entered he found what he so eagerly desired.

THE night was hideous with the horrible din of the blood-mad. The screaming hags were fighting like demons to get at the prisoner, and they would have spoiled the play prematurely if not held back by force. Cameron's feet were hobbled with a small chain. Then two warriors, protecting themselves against the heat with robes of green hide, dragged him to the edge of the coals and forced him to a sitting posture. The heat scorched the bare flesh. Cameron's eyes became distended and his tongue worked desperately to find moisture in his dry mouth.

This slow baking process, continued for some minutes, was so cunningly regulated as to do the victim no serious harm, albeit inflicting exquisite pain. At last one of the torturers, as though moved by compassion, held out a small kettle of water while the other yanked Cameron to his feet. Cameron greedily lunged his head forward to secure a mouthful. The warrior snatched it back, drank heartily and poured what remained on to the ground. This bit of play, a mere preliminary to the real and lasting agony, was greeted with prolonged howls of approval. Cameron bit his lips and braced his shoulders.

"Ho! Ho!" roared the onlookers.

Again the prisoner was forced close to the coals, this time so near that his flesh began to shrivel. Then he was drawn back a pace and another brave offered him water. Cameron ignored the kettle until it was pressed almost against his lips, when his suffering drove him to try once more. This time he was permitted to bury his mouth in the fluid only to jerk back his head with a groan of pain. It was scalding hot.

"Ho! Ho! The white man does not like the drink of the Iroquois," exulted the warrior.

A crescendo of fiendish approval lasted for nearly a minute and was only stilled when the deep voice of the master of ceremonies called for silence. This was the signal for the torture to begin in earnest. Two braves seized the victim and made a chain fast about his waist and prepared to hurl him inside the glowing circle. The stake, a large sapling trimmed of its branches, was sizzling as the heat dried up the oozing sap.

The savage spectators glared expectantly.

Even the brood of hags ceased their clamor. Now was come the real test between the prisoner's defiant bearing and the resources of the Iroquois. It was to be a duel, such as the Indians ever loved to witness; shrinking flesh and raw nerves against all the devices for inflicting physical suffering the diabolism of the Long House could put in practise.

When the chain was firmly fastened about Cameron's waist the warriors bent their knees and made ready to hurl him inside the fatal ring. From the opposite side a brave drew a long breath and leaped the hurdle of coals to catch the slack of the chain and make it secure about the stake. But something shot over the victim's head and twined like a snake about the neck of the brave.

With a yelp of astonishment the young brave tore the thing loose and leaped from the circle. As he held it above his head the spectators glared incredulously. The warriors holding Cameron released him to gape in amazement, and he worked back from the fierce heat unrebuked. A new and unthinkable climax had been thrust into the scene.

What so miraculously dropped from the velvet heavens was a wampum belt, and, at that, one the Iroquois recognized as a cherished possession of the federated tribes. It was seven rows of beads wide and several hundred beads long. It contained the figure of a man at one end and a cross at the other, both in white against a dark ground, and connected by a single row of white beads. There was none who did not identify it as a French belt, the markings recording the great distance the envoy traveled in order to present his "talk" to the Long House.

But the reasons for the envoy's coming, as "talked" by him into the wampum, was known only to the hereditary keeper of the wampum. It was in wampum that the Six Nations recorded their speeches, treaties, laws, tribal and intertribal history. It was the last step before hieroglyphics, and perhaps on a par with and yet more subtle than picture-writing. The pattern of the beads associated the sign or object with some historical fact or epochal idea. Therefore the office of the hereditary keeper was semi-sacred and its inviolability was to be maintained at all costs.

While each savage mind was struggling to find an explanation for the belt flying through the night there rang out a mocking voice up the slope, the words falling like the crack of a whip.

"Ho! Ho! A white man comes to trade!" it proclaimed.

With an inarticulate, primitive cry of rage the Iroquois emerged from their stupor.

"Ho! Ho!" continued the mocking voice. "Who trades for *kanasa* (wampum)? Who will give white flesh for white and black and purple wampum? Six strings is the price of a life. The white man offers seven strings."

The stake and its victim were forgotten as the Indians fixed their astounded gaze on the figure of Martin standing in the brightly illumined doorway of the council. If not for his confession that his flesh was white they would have accepted him for a Cayuga, with the totem of a dancing bear showing on his oily chest.

"Ho! Who trades for Onondaga belts? Who trades for the records of the Long House?"

With a terrific yell the savages sprang forward in a mass, now realizing a stranger stood in the place of the keeper of the sacred wampum; but before they could swarm up the slope and wipe out the profanation Martin pulled the keg into view and held his pistol to it, loudly warning:

"Keep back, ye dogs! Keep far back, or I blow up this council-house and your wampum. This is gunpowder."

As he spoke his left hand piled the precious records about the keg.

The onrush halted abruptly. Having impressed upon the Iroquois the need of prudence Martin resumed his taunts and boisterously called out:

"I see six strings of purple beads bound together—the Six Nations." And he held up the cluster of strings symbolic of the Long House. "Here are seven of purple and a handful of white—the voice of the Onondagas. And strings that speak for the Cayugas, the Mohawks and the Senecas. Who has a white man called Cameron to trade for strings and belts of wampum?"

A tall savage, wearing the insignia of the hereditary chiefship of the Onondaga Bear clan, lifted his right hand, palm outward, and slowly advanced beyond his fellows to act as spokesman, as befitted him who headed the roll of the federal chiefs.

"What does the white man do here, painted like a Cayuga?" he demanded.

"He comes to trade with Wathatotarho," answered Martin, giving him his official name and title.

"What has he to trade?"

"Belts of the Onondaga, of every tribe in the Six Nations; the records of the Long House. For good measure he will throw in the hereditary keeper of the wampum." As he spoke Martin reached aside and dragged a kicking bundle into view.

Wathatotarho faced the warriors and solemnly announced:

"He has been touched by the Great Spirit. He shall go in peace."

"Ho, he shall go in peace," was the rumbling response.

"The Great Spirit sent the white man here in an Indian skin to trade with the Iroquois," calmly corrected the ranger. "He must remain till he has made a bargain. Many moons ago the French talked with you with thirty-six belts, the greatest wampum talk ever held till now. Behold! I talk to you with more than a hundred belts. I talk with this one, sent to the Long House long ago by the Wagunhas (Ottawa); I talk with this one, black, with rows of white between, with the white council-fire in the middle, and the white road, leading to Johnson Hall—Sir William Johnson's friendship belt, given when he first met the Iroquois."

There rose dolorous howls from the Mohawks, who still mourned the dead superintendent. Martin held up another, ragged at the ends, obviously an ancient belt, and said:

"Or I talk with this, a peace belt sent the Onondaga by the Cherokee Nation. Who wants to buy? I give *kanasa* for a white man called Cameron."

"The white man has gunpowder in the keg?" from Wathatotarho.

For an answer Martin selected a small belt such as the Senecas used in the White Dog Sacrifice, and dipped it in a gourd of water and then sprinkled it liberally with the powder. Wadding it into a ball he suddenly hurled it toward the fire. With cries of dismay a dozen hands stretched out to catch the consecrated object, but failed, and the belt fell at the edge of the coals. Instantly there came a *swish* and a bright flash that removed all doubt as to the nature of the black sand.

"Back of this council-house is a dead Mohawk dog. Take that belt in payment," cried Martin.

The savages stared aghast. Mutterings of ferocious rage rippled through the dark ranks, and several braves at the ends of the lines detached themselves and slipped into the undergrowth. Martin pulled the keg and belts back from the door and warned:

"Listen, ye Iroquois, to my last words. The man Cameron is to be set free now, or I blow myself and this council-house and these belts into the sky. Call back your young men who foolishly think to take me by surprise. Your answer? Shall I fire?" And he tightened his grip on the pistol.

Wathatotarho threw up both hands in a gesture of surrender.

"The man Cameron shall go with you. Take him and leave us our wampum."

With an exclamation of joy Cameron advanced up the slope with no hand attempting to stay his steps, but he became bewildered when the ranger sharply ordered him to halt.

"It's one of their tricks, Jim Cameron," fiercely explained Martin. "Stay where you are till they bring your clothes. They must take you to Fort Stanwix. On arriving send back a written word that I may know you are safe."

"Jo Martin! Old Jo!" choked the big fellow, rubbing his eyes.

"Dancing Black Bear of the Cayugas!" corrected Martin frigidly. "Here's something I was to give you. Take it, and be——"

Then to Wathatotarho:

"Let your braves take the prisoner to Stanwix and guard him from harm. He will send a talking paper to me. Then, and not till then, you shall have back your belts and your wampum-keeper."

With that he closed the door and made it fast.

* * *

"THE white man has his talking paper. Why does he not leave us in peace?" demanded Wathatotarho outside the closed door.

Martin reread the scrawl which had been shoved under the door. He knew it was genuine, for Cameron had written:

We fought side by side at Oriskany and on the river trail to Cotton's.

Jim Cameron,
Ft. Stanwix.

Striking his ax against the door the ranger ordered—

"Stand far away, Wathatotarho."

The chief retired to the long line of warriors. It was night and several fires brought the long lines into half-relief. And Martin knew the lines completely encircled the council-house. As he heard the chief retreat the ranger stooped over the sachem and pressed the point of his knife to the man's throat, and, removing the gag, hissed:

"Say again the words, 'He's in the shed.' But say them softly."

The sachem groaned in a paroxysm of rage, limbered up his jaws and did as told. Martin clapped back the gag and tested his imitation of the sachem's voice. There was a peculiar, shrill, crackling note that was hard to get, but he believed he had it. Already he had adorned himself with the sachem's necklace of beads and other insignia, and by means of the paint-bag had counterfeited the sachem's facial decorations. He also had further thinned his hair by a Spartan use of the knife and was now ready to trust his luck to the night.

Placing a kettle of water beside the powder and throwing the sachem's painted skin cloak over his shoulders he sagged his shoulders and bent his back in a semblance of old age. Then he drew a deep breath and threw back the door violently.

Wathatotarho and his warriors surged forward as the door flew open, then remembered the keg and fell back. But instead of the intruder's erect figure they beheld the bowed form of the hereditary keeper of the wampum; and even as they gazed and wondered how he became free he seized the kettle of water and dashed it over the powder and in a shrill voice screeched:

"He's in the shed! The powder is wet."

And with one frightened glance over his shoulder he scuttled down the slope toward the savages.

"AN ATTACK," yelled a sentinel as a splutter of rifle-shots aroused the woods before Fort Stanwix.

"Don't shoot!" yelled Cameron, knocking up the rifle as a painted savage reeled into the opening with a war arrow flapping from his left shoulder. "It's Jo Martin. Come on, fellers!"

And he dropped over the stockade with several scouts at his heels.

Martin, streaked with blood and sweat and dirt, hobbled toward them. Out of the forest burst three Iroquois, a Mohawk, an Onandaga, and a Seneca, each striving to count a coup by securing the mad white man's scalp. They were at Martin's heels while Cameron and his followers were several hundred yards distant. Martin realized he must do his own fighting for a bit longer. He wheeled, and holding the long rifle with one hand shot the Onondaga, who went down with a gush of blood stifling his death-cry.

Dropping the rifle and summoning all his strength the ranger plucked the ax from his belt and spun it in a glittering circle full into the face of the Seneca, who dropped with no semblance of features left. The Mohawk hurled his ax and missed and turned to flee, but tripped and sprawled headlong. As he regained his feet Cameron caught him by the neck, and, thus holding him, swung him clear of the ground and about his head and hurled him with sickening force against a stump.

They carried Martin, more dead than alive, inside the fort and placed him on a pallet. His shoulders and chest bore testimony to the fight he had made in winning through to Stanwix. As they washed and dressed his wounds he opened his eyes and scowled feebly on beholding Cameron.

"Don't say it, Jo," huskily begged Cameron. "The birchbark she sent me. Listen. It says, 'I love the man who fetched you back.' Betty sent it. She wouldn't give me an answer the day I went to help you hold 'em back on the river trail. But it was you—you all the time."

There was a flutter of skirts through the open door and Cameron was pushed aside that Betty herself might kneel by the ranger and lay her cheek against his hideously painted face.

"Always you, Jo," she sobbed. "But you angered me by trying to dictate. A maid's a maid but once—and shouldn't be hurried. Then you said you'd force me to marry you—and never made love to me—or gave me a chance."

Cameron reached over the girl's shoulder and seized the ranger's right hand, saying:

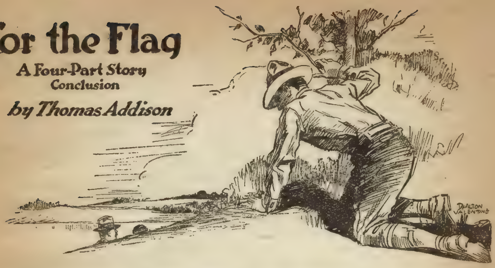
"You saved me from the stake, Jo. You've got the girl I wanted. I owe you a life, Jo. It's yours at the call. Good luck and good fortune—I'm off for Mich'limack'nac."

For the Flag

A Four-Part Story

Conclusion

by Thomas Addison



"The Boss of Powderville," "G 2—Defective," etc.

CHAPTER XXV

THE SIGNAL FROM THE WOODS

BILLY went up to the roof and loosed the flag; the pole had withstood the storm bravely. He reported that he could see nothing of the Germans. But this was not strange. The binocular could sweep the distant reaches of the Santa Marta road, but close at hand the trees prevented a view of the ravine on either side. To the west the hill dropped away forbiddingly to the lower lands. To the east was the gentle slope of the old coffee field. Farther east where the footbridge was to be found, according to Diego, a stretch of the primeval forest intervened. And to the south the forest again blocked the view.

They lunched, and afterward the four of them gathered in the living-room to discuss the situation. They had decided that it was unnecessary to keep a watch at Kaufman's door. He could not break it down without making a commotion that would raise the dead, and his barred windows guarded against escape in that direction.

The rain was over. Sam was patrolling the grounds with a loaded Mauser. Tia Matilde was bringing into the dining-room pantry the supplies she had cooked. Tio Diego had gone to his hut on the edge of the woods on some errand of his own. Winifred threw open the shutters of the living-room.

"We can close them at a moment's notice," she said. "It is like a tomb in here with only these peepholes to let the light in."

Jimmy had broached the cigars brought from Cortina. They were mild and Brewer, who smoked only occasionally, was drawing on one with what small relish the hour permitted. He was standing at a front window looking out. Billy, sprawled in inelegant comfort in an easy chair, remarked sagely—

"What we ought to have done was to hustle out and chop that bridge down."

Brewer glanced around at him.

"It would only have delayed them, Billy. They would have gone back to the ford, and waited until they could get across."

"It seems to me that if they had known about the bridge they would be here by now," advanced Winifred. "They have had time for it."

Brewer made a motion of assent.

"Yes. And there is another thing. I may have been wrong in my conclusions. The men I saw might very well have been on their way to Santa Marta, not here. I can give no reason for thinking they were Germans. I simply had a feeling that they were."

He deprecated this feeble logic with a meager smile.

"If I could get over to the other side of the ravine I'd soon find out if there were any Germans there," observed Jimmy.

He brushed the ash from his cigar, scowling and grimacing thoughtfully.

"Yes, and get nabbed by them," Billy scoffed.

"Oh, maybe not. I'd try it higher up, and work down to them through the woods."

Billy grunted his disfavor of the plan.

"Come again, father. Diego says it will be night before any one can cross. That was some sprinkle we had, if it was short. And if it's a boat you are thinking of, there isn't any. I asked Diego."

"I might swim it."

"Ever try swimming in a mill race? You don't know what a babbling little brook can be in this country after a cloudburst. And if you could do it they'd pot you before you were half over. A neat way to rob the Perry millions of an heir. Gee whiz!"

Brewer slewed around abruptly to the window. Jimmy spoke up quickly.

"You are a cheerful hand to have about, dear child. A real inspiration in a time of trouble. I'm glad I brought you along."

He managed a careless laugh, and with it, covertly, a black look at Billy. The boy stared at him. What had he said to bring this glowering visitation on himself? He was on the point of injuredly demanding an explanation when an interruption turned the thoughts of all into other channels. Sam appeared at the window where Brewer was standing. He had come around the house from the west side. His manner was mysterious.

"I ain't let him see I'se a-pryin' on him, but 'pears like Mister Coughem he carryin' on wif somebuddy over yander." He jerked a Gargantuan thumb in the direction of the woods that ran along the southern edge of the coffee field. He's done t'rowed open de shutters, an' he's floutin' er rag out de winder. 'Tain't jes' to 'muse himse'f, I 'low, yit I kain't make out nobuddy over dar."

They were all crowded around the window now.

"It was the Germans you saw, father," exclaimed Winifred. "They found the bridge."

"I wish I could know how many there are," mused Brewer. "They won't try to parley with us after the reception we gave them on their first visit."

"I am going up on the roof. Perhaps I can see them," Jimmy said. He signed to Billy to follow him.

"They may shoot you!" cried Winifred. "Don't go up."

"I won't show myself more than I can help," he assured her. "I doubt if they carry anything but pistols, and it's a far shot from the woods."

The field-glass was in the chair where Billy had dropped it when he came down from his survey before lunch. Jimmy seized it. He was about to mount the ladder, with Billy to support it, when it occurred to him that he would better have a peep at Kaufman first. He tiptoed to his door, and pushed the slide back gently.

If the imperial envoy had been signaling to any one he was not at this moment so engaged. He was at his southeast window, stock still, and muttering to himself, slowly, with curious silences intervening. As he watched, Jimmy saw Kaufman nod to himself, and raise his hand. There was a towel in it. He reached his arm through the bars, and went through a sequence of motions—up and down, and from side to side in, it appeared, some sort of preestablished order.

Jimmy closed the slide and returned to Billy. He told him what he had seen.

"Wig-wagging!" the boy exclaimed. "There's army training for you! I bet it is Neiderlein talking to him. We ought to stop it, Jimmy. Kaufman is telling him what to do."

"Let Brewer know," Jimmy bade him. "I can manage to get up here, I reckon, without a fall."

Billy ran off. Jimmy climbed the ladder. He lifted a wing of the skylight until he could push his head through the opening. The ladder wobbled crazily under him, and he clutched at the skylight casing to save himself. Then, of a sudden, he found his footing firmer. The ladder was being steadied from below.

"I am holding it," said a voice. It was Winifred.

Jimmy looked down at her.

"Thank you," he returned. "I was making a mess of it. Billy told you about Kaufman?"

"Yes. He and father are planning something. Do be careful up there. Don't let them see you."

"I don't think they can. I won't keep you long."

He rested his elbows on the coaming and conned the coffee field and the adjoining wood with the binocular. If Kaufman had ceased his signaling there would in all likelihood be a response unless—and this was possible—the minister's message was final. In such case no one would show himself in the open, Jimmy decided.

"Do you see any one?" Winifred called up to him.

He lowered the glass as he replied.

"Not a soul. They've done talking, for the time anyway. I think I'll come down. Ha! Wait a minute."

He had put the glass to his eyes for a last look. Something moved in the field of vision—an animal of some kind, he thought at first, skulking in the brush at the verge of the woods. It was moving away from the trees in a line that would take it along the bottom of the hill and in the direction of the ravine. Jimmy revised his initial impression.

"That's no four-footed beast," he murmured.

A SMALL clear space amid the bushes lay in the path of the prowler. Jimmy centered his gaze on it. The thing came to it, and darted across. It was a man, bent double and running. He was immediately swallowed up in the farther bushes. One of the Germans, of course. Any one on a peaceable errand would not act in this way.

Jimmy turned his glass to the woods. If there were others following he wanted to know how many. But nothing stirred. He swept the coffee field again; there was no movement in it. The man was lost to view.

The sound of hammering jarred the stillness. It startled Jimmy. He drew his head in from the skylight and questioned Winifred. She was holding the ladder with rigid arms, bracing it against his sudden shift of balance.

"What is it—that noise?" he asked.

"Father and Billy are nailing Herr Kaufman's shutters up. A board on the outside."

Jimmy grinned.

"*Incommunicado.* Fine!" He started down. "Well, I saw the chap. He was running toward the ravine. There are no others, or at any rate they didn't show themselves." He stood beside her now on the floor. "Thank you for your help."

She waved it aside.

"If we are to succeed each must help where he can. Why was the man running to the ravine? Can you guess? What could he want there if they came over on the bridge? They can't bring the car across."

"It is what I'd like to know," rejoined Jimmy. "It couldn't be that only one of them tried the bridge. And yet if all came why is that fellow heading for the river?"

The hammering started up again, and from Kaufman's room proceeded harsh cries of expostulation.

"There are three windows," commented Winifred. "They are at the second."

Jimmy was thinking of that skulking figure in the bushes.

"I'm going to see what he's up to," he announced. "No, not Herr Kaufman; I can hear what he's up to," he laughed. "I mean that other Hun. I am going down to the river."

He ran into the living-room and picked up his revolver from the table. Winifred followed him to the door.

"Do you think it wise?" she asked. Her eyes were troubled. "Because you saw only one man it doesn't indicate that he is alone. The others may be waiting for him. You may fall into a trap."

"But," he argued, "we decided, didn't we, that if they had come by the bridge there would be nothing to call them to the ravine—not while the water is high."

"I don't know what to say," she answered with an anxious frown. "Only it seems to me that you are running a risk with no advantage to be gained. It seems to me that our part is to wait for what may happen. We are on the defensive."

"Yes, but if I can find out what is doing down there we shall be doubly armed. To know what the other fellow is going to do before he does it is some advantage, isn't it?" He smiled at her whimsically. "I'll keep both eyes open, one in front and one behind. He won't catch me asleep, that chap."

She said nothing. She saw that he was bent on going, and she stepped aside from the door. He paused and held out his hand.

"Will you wish me luck, Winifred?"

It was the second time that he had called her by her given name, yet she showed no resentment. She accepted it as a condition of the strange intimacy in which events had placed them.

"I shall watch for you to come back," she said simply, and let her hand rest briefly in his.

He had left the house and was crossing to the fringe of trees on the brow of the hill when he heard her call to him—

"Mr. Perry!"

He turned. She sat at a window of the living-room. She had drawn to one of the shutters, and had paused with the other half-closed.

"If you have trouble fire a shot," she finished.

He returned a step or two.

"That was clear," he said. "But the first part—please repeat it."

"The first part?" She did not understand.

"Yes. The name. Mr. Smith is 'Billy' to his friends. I claim a similar recognition from mine. I am 'Jimmy' to those I care for."

He had come back still other steps as he spoke. He was ten yards from her. She regarded him with a detached air, as might one who is asked to solve a complex problem suddenly presented. In the stress of the time that was upon them he had stopped for this—a token of an assured friendship that could never be. How should she answer him? The solution was as old as Mother Eve. She said, speaking gravely and distinctly—

"If you get into trouble, Jimmy, fire a shot to let us know."

The shutter closed. Jimmy started anew on his quest. A smile was on his lips, but not of triumph; it went deeper than that.

CHAPTER XXVI

WHAT DIEGO FOUND

KAUFMAN, in a supreme access of rage, had emptied his water pitcher on Brewer and Billy as they were nailing up the last of the three windows; and he had applied epithets to them in his own tongue that Billy in common decency had refrained from interpreting to Brewer. The latter, however, sensed the reason for his silence. He said:

"I am going in to speak to this fellow, Billy. Come with me."

Kaufman greeted them with a rabid look. He burst out at Billy in a flood of German. Brewer interfered, his eyes narrowing on the man.

"You can speak English—do it!" he snapped.

Kaufman paid no regard to him. He continued his animadversions to Billy, who in a way of his own, brought to pass what Brewer had failed to do. He compelled the German to employ his English in self-defense.

"He says," Billy reported to Brewer with nice enunciation, "that his eyes are not strong, and he appreciates the darkening of the room for him."

"That is not so! It is a lie!" bellowed the diplomat. He shook a furious finger at the recreant youth. "You are a German, and you are faithless to your blood—a miserable renegade!"

"Hold up there!" Billy's chin protruded belligerently. "I'm not a German, not any more than Roosevelt is a Dutchman. Get me straight. I'm an American, born, bred and brought up under the flag that floats above this house—the Stars and Stripes of America."

"*Der Teufel hole Amerika!*" shrieked the other.

"And," continued Billy, unmindful of the objurgation, "what German blood is in me is clean—straight from the honest soil—and I'm proud of it. But for the murdering Kaiser who has made the German name a stink in the world I say—to hell with him and all his brood!"

The imperial envoy staggered under this blasphemy. He strove to speak, but only swallowed horribly. Brewer spoke instead.

"I wish to inform you, Kaufman, that there will be no more wig-wagging from this house. If you put a hand out of one of these windows the negro Sam will chop it off."

This definite way of stating the alternative made its impress on the minister. It brought him down to the realities of his plight. He had been quick to see that through the shutter peepholes he could still signal to his people. But now! The image of the black Goliath rose before him and chilled his blood.

"I think that's all," Brewer added.

He looked at Billy, and they moved to the door. Kaufman called to them explosively.

"A moment! I have friends at hand. You will save yourselves from harm if you stop where you are in this outrage. Restore me to liberty, and my friends will go away. You have my official word for it."

Brewer contemplated him with a strangely interested air.

"Your official word, you say?"

"*Ja!*"

"A promise in the Kaiser's name?"

"*Ja! Ja!*"

Brewer swung to his heel, and drew open the door.

"Come," he said to Billy. "He offers us only brass."

With the roar of a maddened bull Kaufman hurled himself at them. Billy was standing back of Brewer in the room. He jumped aside and stuck out a foot. The representative of Imperial Germany came down in a most democratic sprawl. He was not hurt, they saw; he was only wofully stripped of his bravado and breath.

Billy grinned at Brewer.

"Shall we go now?" he suggested.

For answer Brewer motioned him out and bolted the door. Winifred came running from her room to meet them. She had heard the crash of Kaufman's fall.

"What was it?" she inquired anxiously.

"An overturned chair," Brewer told her.

She knew it was an evasion to quiet her alarm, and it pleased her. She did not press the question, and they went together to the living-room.

"Where is Jimmy?" Billy queried. "Not on the roof all this time?"

She recounted what had taken place.

"I told Sam to let us know if he heard a shot," she ended.

Brewer looked grave.

"I don't like it," he said. "It was a foolish thing to do."

Billy, who could entertain the adventure in an alluring light, did not agree with him. But he would not contradict him openly.

"It wouldn't be a bad thing to know how many we've got to handle," he advanced. "What I can't make out is why the dickens they don't come at us. There's nothing to prevent. What's holding them off? Maybe Jimmy can tell us when he gets back."

Some one knocked at the shutters of the east window. Winifred had closed them all when Jimmy left. Brewer crossed to the window and reconnoitered the outside. It was Sam, and with him was Tio Diego. Brewer threw open the shutters.

Sam pointed to the peasant.

"Dere's somethin' he got on his min', Boss, an' I kain't make head er tail on it. If dey'd only speak so's people could un'erstan' w'at dey's aimin' at it'd save er heap er trubbel."

DIEGO shrugged hopelessly. He knew that Brewer's Spanish was a thing of verbal shreds and tatters, and his daughter's was but little better. But—as Billy appeared—here was a Christian who could speak the language of the blessed saints, if not with the entire excellence of one born and cradled in it. He erupted into a passionate recital, in which shoulders, hands, and every facial muscle took a part. Billy stopped him from time to time to translate to the others. In substance Diego's story was this:

He had gone to his hut for tobacco to make cigarets. He got to thinking of the old footbridge at the south end of the ravine; it seemed that what he had said about it to the Americans was considered important. He decided to go and see if it was still there.

He followed an old, little-known trail, for it was the short way to the bridge. It led across the Santa Marta road, and then again into the forest until it brought up at the ravine. One could, of course, follow the stream from the ford, but that was the long way around and the more difficult.

Well, when finally he came out on the river there was no bridge. It had gone. There was some wreckage of it on the bank where it had torn away from its anchorage, but the bridge itself was not there. He examined the wreckage, and the fractures were fresh. He looked about him. There were scrambling muddy marks on the rocks—quite fresh—and back a little were footprints in the soft earth. A man's—one only—one single man.

It was easy now to tell what had happened. The bridge was old, it was weak, it was rotten. And the storm had shaken it. The man started over on it. He was halfway when it began to give. It was as safe to advance as to retreat. He went on, and by the grace of his patron saint reached the bank and threw himself down on it as the bridge broke and fell.

That was all. Diego had followed the footprints a few rods. The man was going north along the river. Diego had turned back and hurried home to tell what he had seen.

Billy took from his pocket one of the silver dollars he had extracted from the reluctant Whittaker and handed it to Diego. He commended him for what he had done, and bade him stay close to the house for the rest of the day. They might have need of him.

"Well, we have learned that there is only one man on this side," said Winifred. "The others must have gone back to the ford on the opposite side as they came."

A little sigh of relief, of which she herself was unaware, escaped her.

"I wonder if it was Neiderlein who got across?" speculated Billy. "It was a leader's job, and he is the legation head in the absence of Kaufman. Huh, Jimmy can take care of him all right."

He helped himself to a cigar from the box on the table, and sat down. Brewer was pacing the room meditatively. Winifred remained by the window, looking out. Sam had resumed his patrol of the grounds. Brewer halted abruptly.

"You say, Winny, that Perry was to fire a shot if he met with trouble?"

"Yes. He promised to."

"What was his plan? He must have had one."

"I don't know, father. He said he was going to find out what the man was up to. I did not ask him how he hoped to do it." Her eyes went to the watch on her wrist. "He has been gone thirty-two minutes."

This scrupulous exactitude brought an odd glance from her father. Even Billy turned his head and regarded her inquisitively. But she was not conscious of the scrutiny. Her gaze was on the out-of-doors again, her attitude alert and tense. Brewer glanced at her a second time, and took up his walk about the room. The minutes dragged by. Billy put his cigar aside and stirred uneasily in his chair.

"Confound it," he rapped out, "this is getting on my nerves. It's like waiting for dinner when you've got to catch a train. He's gone an hour, hasn't he, Miss Winifred?"

"Yes." Her voice was sharp and short.

"I could crawl to the river and back in that time," grumbled Billy.

He got up and began handling the Mausers stacked in a corner, going over them to see if all were loaded, though he knew well that they were, having seen to it himself with Jimmy. But he was restless. He wanted action, any demand on him but the grinding requirement of passive expectancy.

"The difficulty is," said Brewer out of the silence he had been wrapped in, "that if he fires a shot it will be hard to locate it accurately. Sound is deceptive."

"I'm betting he don't have to fire," Billy argued. "Jimmy can take care of himself. He'll be back all smiling. It's just this darned waiting that hurts."

Winifred left the window. She walked mutely past the two to the door. Brewer's eyes followed her.

"Where are you going, Winny?" he inquired.

"To my room. I am tired," she said without looking at him, and went out.

Brewer's gaze remained fastened on the empty doorway. His expression was somber. Billy abandoned the guns and spoke to him. He turned with a quick intake of his breath.

"Now that she is gone, what do you think of it, sir?" Billy asked. "That bunch could have knocked together some sort of a raft, you know, and come across. It's not impossible. And Jimmy may have stumbled right into them without being able to fire his gun."

"I was thinking of that," Brewer admitted. "And, Billy, if it's so what can we do? I've been thinking of that also. They will be coming here. They are five at least, perhaps six—the car was filled with men—and if either of us go it will leave only two to hold the house. We can't count on Diego; he has no real interest in us. And Winifred—she is brave, but after all a woman. If they should break in—well, they are Germans!"

"No, no! We can't take that chance!" cried the boy. "Jimmy would be the first to damn us if we did. We—we will just have to wait, Mr. Brewer. We've got to do it!"

They tried to settle down to it quietly, but the task was too hard for them. Brewer rose from his chair and began pacing the floor again. Then Billy bounced to his feet.

"I'm going to the roof. Maybe I'll see something. Anything is better than this."

Brewer steadied the ladder for him. Billy did not stop on the last rung; he drew himself up to the tiles, and stood there scanning the country with the binocular. Brewer stepped to Winifred's door. He knocked, but there was no response. He opened it, and looked in. She was lying on the bed, her face in the pillows.

"Winny!" he called softly.

She did not answer. He would not have approached her in this way, she knew, if he had news to tell. He lingered a moment voiceless, then closed the door and came away.

Brewer waited by the ladder for Billy. His face was contorted with pain, the pain that bites deeper than any bodily ill. He was roused by Billy's foot on the ladder.

"Could you see anything of them?" he questioned wearily.

Billy shook his head.

"Not a sign." When he was down he said brokenly: "Mr. Brewer, it—it's getting to be more than I can stand. They have got Jimmy—I know it—and we can't do a thing!"

The boy dropped on a chair and covered his brimming eyes with his hands.

CHAPTER XXVII

IN THE ENEMY'S HANDS

THERE were two courses Jimmy could pursue in his hunt for the man he had seen from the housetop. One was to proceed openly down the drive on the east side of the hill to the Santa Marta Road, and follow it leisurely to the ravine as though he were merely curious to see the stage of the water, and was without suspicion of enemy proximity.

The other was to go down the north side of the hill, and through the scrub to the river. From there he could work east along the bank. The boldness of the first appealed to him, but as he thought on it he realized that the man he sought would not be likely to show himself if he saw any one approaching on the public highway. Either that or, if there were others with him, he might be ambushed and taken prisoner. He decided on the second course.

It was slow going down the rocky hill and in the thorny scrub, and it was horribly hot; but he won through and found himself in the dense thickets on the ravine brink. The water, he noted, was falling rapidly though it was still a boiling flood.

He laughed at the thought he had entertained of swimming it; he had never acquired distinction in the art, and this demanded skill as well as strength. He worked his way heedfully in the direction of the Santa Marta Road, and came out finally on a little jut of clear ground just above the pitch of the road to the ford. It was screened from the river by a growth of ironwood bushes and twining sarsaparilla, but on the road side there was nothing that offered stand-up concealment.

Jimmy threw himself flat and crawled toward the brim. Some one directly below was calling across the stream. Answering voices came, and the language was German. Jimmy wanted to find out how many men were on this side and how many on the other. By worming carefully to the verge of the tiny precipice he could see around the screen of bushes, he thought, and could look down also on the road.

A luxuriant flowering plant that he did not know swayed outward from the verge. Its large glossy leaves, raised tier on tier, would afford him protection. He crept toward it, gained it—and clutched at it wildly. The overshot edge of ground, weakened by the rain, was giving way. Jimmy tried to save himself by a backward flop; but the leverage was gone. He came down to the road sliding on his shoulder headforemost in a porridge of mud.

"The devil!" he spurted out in angry dismay, and repeated it—"The devil take it!"

A shout rose from the opposite bank. A voice near at hand spoke in hard English.

"So! You could not wait for us to come. Well, we have one less to deal with. Do not move!"

It was Sub-Lieutenant Karl Hecht of Arraca, and he was alone. None of his men was on this side. A cold smile played on his blond features, and in his hand as he explored Jimmy's pockets was an unpleasant instrument of swift destruction. That he would shoot if resistance was offered Jimmy perfectly understood.

"You win the first round," he said. "It's in my right-hand pocket, what you are looking for."

The exploring fingers came away not only with his revolver, but with his card-case and the letters that were in his breast pocket.

"Get up!" ordered his captor. "Step off to the right, to that tree over there."

Jimmy obeyed. Hecht followed him closely. They plunged through a serried growth of brush off the road and came to the tree. The spot commanded a view of the ford and the Germans on the other side. There were four of them. They were watching him, Jimmy could see, but they did not cry out any more. This man evidently was their leader. Was he Neiderlein?

Hecht pointed to a flat stone in the outer shade of the tree.

"Sit down," he directed. For himself he selected the base of the tree with the trunk for a back. They were well-curtained from the road. Hecht was guarding against a chance interference. He looked into the card-case, fingered the banknotes it contained, and tossed it over to Jimmy. The other matter he examined with care. They were letters from home and the two cablegrams from Perry, Sr. He read them all with sedulous attention, lifting a wary eye frequently to his *vis-à-vis*.

Jimmy could make no protest at this scrutiny of his intimate affairs. He reflected grimly that he was a prisoner of war, in precisely the situation that he himself had placed the Imperial German minister. He had, it was true, refrained from going through Kaufman's pockets, but it was a weak obedience to scruples that warfare took no account of. He could claim no indulgence for it.

Another thought came to Jimmy. He was more than a prisoner of war—he was a spy. And spies were dealt with summarily in a state of war. Here was a small offshoot of the great conflict in which his country was involved, and it was he who had promoted it. By the rules of the game he could expect no leniency from his foe.

He secretly surveyed the man by the tree. He was of his own build, and wiry and hard as nails. Without the gun laid handily at his side he would be a tough customer to tackle, though this to Jimmy would have been no deterrent; even odds was all he asked. If only that gun. . . .

Hecht spoke to him. He had finished his perusal of the letters. They contained nothing of moment to him, but he decided to keep them. He flipped one of the cablegrams with his finger before stowing it away.

"Too slow—eh, Perry—going home to enlist? You did it here."

"I am of an impatient nature," Jimmy answered placidly. He did not intend to let this Hun rag him, whatever came. "You have the advantage of me," he continued. "Do you prefer to have me address you as X, or as a definite quantity?"

The German considered the request. The humor of it passed him by; he saw only the practical side.

"Lieutenant Hecht of the Imperial Reserves," he replied bruskly.

Jimmy raised his brows.

"Oh, I had thought you were that fellow Neiderlein. You got across on the bridge, of course. Why didn't your men come with you?"

"It broke. I made it just in time."

"That was a pity," commented Jimmy. He went on leaving the other to take the remark as he would—"If I am not too inquisitive, Lieutenant Hecht, I would like further information—now that you've got me what are you going to do with me?"

HECHT did not answer. His attention was directed to the men across the river. One of them was down at the water's edge looking out over the current. He turned to his companions and made an affirmative sign.

"If he's thinking of swimming it," Jimmy said conversationally to Hecht, "he'd better go up a way. He'd have a chance of landing here then."

The lieutenant regarded him with a glimmer of interest. This American was not readily disturbed, it appeared.

"You are the one who carried off his Excellency last night," he accused suddenly.

"Am I? Thank you for acquainting me with it." Jimmy bowed to him.

"Why did you do it?" demanded Hecht.

"Oh, just for a joke," rejoined Jimmy carelessly.

The German's look grew black.

"You wished to know what I'm going to do with you," he spat out. "One of two things—exchange you for his Excellency, or shoot you."

Jimmy felt the blood crowd back on his heart, for he was convinced that the threat was not an idle one. Hecht meant it. But to surrender Kaufman to save his own skin was a thing he would not do. And, curiously, in a lightning flash there was limned in his mind the thin, stooped form of Brewer, the expatriate, his hand lifted to the flag, his voice challenging as he cried out—"Let them come and haul it down!"

Jimmy smiled palely as he replied to the Teuton.

"I do not find either proposition agreeable, Mr. Lieutenant."

"It will be one or the other," Hecht asserted.

"That," returned Jimmy evenly, "is your affair. I am done with it."

"It is for your friends to say," jeered Hecht. "I shall submit it to them with the assurance that if they do not accede I will execute you in plain view of them. Afterward we will take his Excellency anyway."

"Not alive. I will bet with you on that, and make it ten to one in your favor."

Hecht stared at him, grunted something in his own tongue, and lapsed into silence. Jimmy had stuffed some cigars in his pocket before leaving the house. They were broken badly, but he found one that was yet smokable, lit it, and with his hands clasped easily about his knee puffed away with assumed indifference to his fate.

Though the day was well advanced—it was four o'clock—the heat was growing instead of diminishing with the declining sun. It was a still, dry, suffocating heat, settling down like a vast blanket over the earth. To Jimmy it seemed as if there was a portent of evil in it, though this, perhaps, could be attributed to his mental state.

His gaze wandered to the opposite rim of the ravine. No one of the Germans was in sight. His gaze came back to Hecht. He was still staring at him. Now he asked:

"So you took me for Herr Neiderlein? Do you not know him?"

"I am happy to say that I do not."

"Then why did you take me for him?"

"We rather looked for him, that's all. We thought his man Landeker, who came this morning, had given him such a glowing report of our hospitality that Neiderlein would want a taste of it himself. I suppose it was Landeker who posted you on the lay of the land out here, or—" Jimmy ventured a random shot—"was it my esteemed friend and proclaimed countrywoman, Miss Mary Taylor?"

Jimmy fancied he saw a change in the stolid face of the man, but if Hecht intended a reply it was cut off by a hail from the river. The Germans were swimming down. One of them, in fact, was landing at a spot below the tree. Hecht stood up. He flipped the sweat from his forehead with a curse at the heat.

"You sit still or the birds will pick your bones on that rock," he growled at Jimmy.

The first German came up steaming from the river, for the enveloping heat had already seized on him. In five minutes he would be dry as tinder, pistol, cartridge belt and all. Hecht uttered a command, and the man went off into the brush. The others came up one by one, big, burly customers. Hecht put a question to them, and after a general searching of pockets one produced a length of whipcord. The first man returned. He held in his hand a smooth, straight, freshly cut stick about two feet long, and an inch thick. Hecht addressed the group briefly. From an occasional gesture in the direction of the hacienda Jimmy judged that he was outlining a plan of assault.

Hecht finished, and two of the men stepped over to the stone where Jimmy sat. One was the man with the stick, and the other the man with the cord. Jimmy's pulse drummed in his ears, and his jaws set like a vise.

"Stand up you, Perry!" Hecht ordered in a brutal tone.

Jimmy jumped up with a suddenness, and a straight out from the shoulder right and left that sent the two men reeling. He went for Hecht. No thought of the gun Hecht held restrained him—he but wanted to reach the fellow and beat him down in the dirt. But instead he went down himself. One of the other men had leaped on him, and clinched in a mighty embrace they rolled on the ground.

Five minutes later Jimmy, dazed and bleeding, was raised to his feet. He could not get up by himself, for through the hollow of his drawn back arms a stick was thrust, and his hands were forced together in front of him and pinioned with the braided whipcord. A hammer blow could not have budged the stick.

Hecht did not give him a glance. He sent a man on ahead to scout the road, and after an interval the party followed. Hecht led. A man was on each side of Jimmy, and roughly helped him through the brush. A third man brought up the rear. In this wise they came to the hacienda gate. The fifth man joined them here. They turned off to the left, and sheltered by the scrub in the coffee field made their way toward the woods on the south of the house. Jimmy could see the flag on the roof drooping lifelessly in the baking air. His heart swelled at the sight.

But what Jimmy could not see was Billy crouched in the skylight opening sweeping the approaches to the house with the binocular. It was the third time he had gone up there since Jimmy left, each previous time bringing only a sickening sense of utter futility. Now, though, as he mechanically quartered the ground below, his glass caught a movement far down in the corner of the field. He waited, scarcely breathing, until in another space he descried the advancing party. He shouted the news to Brewer in a queer high voice.

"I've found them! They are making for the woods. They are going to come at us from that side."

There was a pause. Winifred had run out from her room at the sound of his shrill cry. She stood at her father's side by the ladder, her hands clasped to her breast. A groan broke from the boy above.

"They've got Jimmy! He's in the midst of them. There's something wrong with him. God, I see now! His arms are tied. A rifle, Mr. Brewer. I'll shoot—no, no. I might hit Jimmy. And they are gone! They've reached the woods."

HECHT kept just within the shelter of the trees so that he could hold the house in view. It brought him presently to Tio Diego's hut. The old man was in the act of scurrying from the place. A call from Hecht, and a leveled pistol brought him back. He was trembling to his toes, and when he saw Jimmy, bound and begrimed, his seamed face went the color of lead. Hecht motioned him into the hut. The others remained outside. Jimmy noticed that they placed themselves to the lee of him, and he understood the reason; they were using him as a shield against the shuttered, silent house.

Hecht came out shortly. He had scrawled a note in pencil on the back of one of Jimmy's envelopes.

"You may care to hear this," he said harshly.

He read what he had written.

> In the name of the Imperial German Government I demand the surrender of his Excellency, Herr Adolph Kaufman, the Imperial Minister to the State of Zanhoria. In exchange shall be delivered to you the person of James Perry now in my hands. Failure to comply within one hour will result in the immediate execution of the said James Perry on the spot where he stands.

Jimmy gave him a slow, mocking look.

"You will get Kaufman when you haul down that flag—not before," he drawled.

Hecht handed the missive to Diego.

"Go and bring me an answer," he said to him in Spanish.

The peasant cringed away. Jimmy shouted after him in such Spanish as he could muster on the instant:

"Diego! *Digale jamás—jamás*. Never—never——"

Hecht struck him in the mouth with his open hand.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A JOURNEY FOR TWO

AFTER Don Luis left him Enrique sat for many minutes pondering what he had learned. All the inflammatory passions of his nature were in a seething turmoil. Finally he got up and sought his own room. He dressed for the street, and departed from the house in his car. He drove straight to Ortega's office in the Calle Central. Ortega was not there.

"Of course," he muttered as he drove away. "I should have known. Good God, how hot it is!"

He drove east until he reached the outskirts of the city. Before him rose a towering adobe wall. Barely peeping above it were the eaves of a great oblong building of solid stone. It was the State prison. Backed to that encircling adobe wall many a political offendant had faced a firing-squad in years past.

At the gate an armed sentry stepped out from the guard-house and stopped the car. Segovia made his name and errand known, and after telephonic communication with the prison the man informed him that he could proceed.

It was not the general office he was received in. The room was evidently set apart for a specific purpose. It was quite bare except for a thick matting on the floor, a few plain chairs, and a large flat desk by the window. Ortega sat at this desk. A man with a notebook in his hand was leaving the room by a door opposite that through which Segovia was ushered in. Beyond the desk, in the corner, was placed a screen behind which was a table for the man with the notebook when an interview was to be secretly recorded.

Ortega greeted Segovia with an incurious smile. He had surmised his errand when his name was telephoned from the gate. He said, in his calm, unemotional way:

"Yes, she is here. Your uncle has been talking with you?"

Segovia nodded. For the time he could find no words. He remained standing before the desk. The other's leisurely scrutiny of him brought the red to his brow. Don Emilio was, of course, thinking of the fool's part he had played.

"He told you, I presume," pursued Ortega with a reflective air, "that it was Mrs. Isaacs who sent the note about the wireless; that it was Mrs. Isaacs who learned from Morales who stole the Washington dispatch; that it was Mrs. Isaacs who planned with his Excellency, the American minister, the little affair in Dolores Street; that, in brief, it is Mrs. Isaacs, suspected by none of us, who has enabled the Government to nip this plot and bring the plotters to justice. Don Luis has told you this, has he not, my friend?"

"Yes," broke out Segovia, "he has. Must I acknowledge to you, as I did to him, that I was a blind fool? It is not for that I came, but I will do it, if it suits your humor, for I have a favor to ask of you."

Ortega made a deprecatory motion with his hand.

"My dear fellow, one does not require acknowledgment of a patent fact. The favor. You wish to see her?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

There was an eloquent pause. The bald question drove home to Segovia. He had come away under the scourge of a black desire to face this perfidious woman, to heap on her words that would bring her to her knees before him, make her eat of the dust at his feet. And then what? What had he in his heart to do? His fingers worked unpleasantly, like claws; his lips curled back from his teeth; his body stiffened into the rigidity of a wild beast about to spring.

Ortega was Latin himself, and he knew the signs. They did not revolt him; he felt indeed a current of sympathy for the boy; but his years and training—more the latter than the former—had taught him the folly of playing to his passions. He said quietly:

"Why anticipate? She will be shot with the others."

"She is to be shot!"

Enrique's fingers slackened. There was a relaxation in all his body. The moment before he could have killed Mary Taylor with his own hands; now he was suddenly cleansed of the desire in the flood of a new emotion. What in his unreasoning madness seemed an act of righteous retribution, in the cold light of Ortega's announcement stood out solely as a base personal revenge. After all, Mary Taylor had simply worked in her country's behalf as Mrs. Isaacs had worked in behalf of hers.

"She is to be shot!" he repeated dully. "Why, you can't do that. She is a German citizen, and we are not at war with Germany."

"We are," Ortega contradicted. "The President has issued the proclamation. Kaufman's passports are waiting for him. We have had enough of these plotting Germans. We intend to smoke out that nest of theirs on the Negro, and send them packing."

"But what she has done is ante-factum," Segovia insisted, his mind unable to entertain but the one hideous objective that confronted it. "You can't——"

"We can and will," interrupted the superintendent. "We are not standing on points of law these days, Enrique—not with the German empire. It knows no law." He asked abruptly: "Do you wish to see her now, this Ella Prietz?"

"No! God, no!"

Enrique recoiled from the thought. What were the petty wounds to his self-esteem compared with the fate that was stalking to meet this woman? He could visualize it in every dreadful detail—the cold gray of the breaking day; the blank, bullet-pitted wall; the fine, supple figure placed before it; the leveled guns; the word of command. . . .

"No, no!" he cried again. "I have no account against her. It is wiped away."

He took a few perturbed steps about the room.

"That is well," said Don Emilio soberly. "Now we will proceed to other matters. Herr Kaufman's detention is no longer necessary. If we had delayed a little—but on the whole the step is not to be regretted. We were rid of the man at a crucial moment today. Will you go out there at dark, Enrique, and let Jimmy know what has occurred? I will put a closed car at your disposal to bring them back—Kaufman, and those two fine boys. It will be best to return them under cover of night."

"I will go," assented Segovia indifferently. He did not care now what Jimmy might think, for he was lost to the consideration of his own poor vanity. He little dreamed that at this same hour Jimmy also was in peril of his life.

SOME one rapped for admittance on the door. At the superintendent's bidding a prison guard entered. He crossed to the desk and spoke in a low tone. Ortega gave him a brief word in reply. He viewed Segovia thoughtfully when the guard was gone, and said:

"The first of our expected guests this evening has arrived, the Señor Don Manuel Morales. Sit down, Enrique. I believe I would like to have you stay."

A gleam of interest lighted the young man's somber eyes. It was not for Morales—he was a black traitor, and deserved the fate reserved for him. But he would speak of Mary Taylor—it was inevitable that he should—and it was this that invested him with transitory interest for Enrique. He took the seat Ortega indicated. It was a little to one side, and back of the superintendent's chair. The man with the notebook entered in response to a button call, and disappeared behind the screen. Another button call and the door fronting the desk opened. Morales was thrust in and the door closed.

The heat was oppressive, but it was not altogether this that made the sweat bubble out on the banker's pasty face, and drip down from his hairless crown. His beady eyes quested about the room, passed Segovia over and came to a fascinated stare on the quiet man leaning back with folded arms at the desk.

"Kindly come forward, señor," requested the superintendent blandly.

The short, heavy figure moved as directed. No sound came from him but a stertorous laboring of the lungs.

"You are distressed, señor," went on the superintendent. "Is there, perhaps, something that I can do to relieve you?"

He was playing with him as a cat a mouse.

"An annoying mistake has been made, Señor Superintendent," Morales forced from his dry lips, though the voicing of it was scarcely above a whisper. "I do not know why I am brought here. I have been told nothing."

"In that case I shall be glad to supply the omission," Ortega answered suavely. "We are informed that you have plotted with Herr Kaufman, the German envoy, to overturn the present Government of Zanhoria and place General Peralta in power. Does this enlighten you, señor?"

The banker had, with an enormous effort, regained a measure of control over himself. He was reacting to man's primal instinct to fight for his life. And he was misled by his inquisitor's mild manner. His voice rose in strength as he replied.

"None of this is so. It is an outrage that a person of position should be haled before you in this way. Disgraceful! Some malicious scoundrel has defamed me. I demand the proof, Señor Superintendent."

Ortega spread his palms apart.

"Ah, now you have asked a question." He appeared to reflect a moment. "Did not Miss Prietz acquaint you with her loss last night?"

A tremor ran through Morales' frame.

"I do not understand," he declared.

Through the heavy fear that sat upon him a distinct bewilderment was manifest.

Ortega saw that in this at least the man was honest. The woman had not told him, afraid, perhaps, for her life. She had fled to the legation and told her story there, and they—now that the fat was in the fire—had not cared what became of their Zanhorian tools.

"You do not know Miss Prietz?" he inquired, apparently astonished.

Morales was dumb.

"Ah, then I don't wonder that you fail to understand," continued Don Emilio softly. "Miss Prietz was dispossessed last night of certain papers she was charged by General Peralta to deliver into Herr Kaufman's hand. Among these papers was a list of the general's supporters in Cortina, and the preferments promised them if the revolution succeeded. Do you comprehend now, señor?"

Morales' assumed bravado had dropped from him as the last leaf from the naked tree. His face was a shocking picture—the color of rancid tallow, and with the muscles of it working as though there were living worms writhing under the skin. Enrique turned from the doomed traitor. He felt not pity for him; it was sickening disgust. And yet it killed in him also the final throb of compassion for Mary Taylor. She had used Morales, and denied him his one opportunity of escape. Ortega with a singular synchronism of thought was saying this very thing.

"Miss Prietz should have mentioned it, Señor," he purred. "It deprived you of a chance—your car, the open road and away. It was thoughtless of Miss Prietz. Treacherous, one might even call it."

Morales raised an aspen hand.

"Enough!" he cried hoarsely. He swallowed with difficulty. "You have taken her, too? She is here?"

Ortega abandoned the rôle he had played. He sat erect at his desk. His expression was stern and relentless.

"Yes," he replied, "she is here. She was taken in the attempt to leave the city. She will be tried and shot with the rest of you."

Morales nodded, impatiently one would say.

"Yes, yes! I know. I know what to expect."

He came a step nearer the desk. His little eyes were glittering. He steadied his twitching nerves as best he could, and he said:

"Señor Ortega, there is a thing she can tell that is of much importance to the State. I can make her tell it, and in reparation for—for——"

"I understand," cut in the superintendent. "Why not tell it yourself, Morales?"

"Because I know only part. But with that I can force her to speak. You have a witness—the Señor Lieutenant here—and if you will have her brought in——"

He paused and waited.

Ortega considered him keenly. His finger pressed a button. To the guard who answered:

"Bring to me Ella Prietz," he directed. He looked at Enrique. "There is the screen if you wish, Señor Segovia. You can hear distinctly what passes."

Enrique made a half-movement to rise. He caught Morales' gaze fixed on him, and stayed. Why should he let the man think that he cared?

There was a stir at the door, and Mary Taylor was led in. At Ortega's signal the guard withdrew. The young woman's eyes went first to Segovia, then to the two others. She was pale, and calm, and collected. And she was silent. She had been questioned by this police official before. She had nothing to say then; she had nothing to say now. Ortega spoke to the banker.

"Well, señor?"

Morales responded with a short gesture. He walked slowly over to where the girl stood by the door. He stopped a few feet from her.

"We are fortunately met, Miss Prietz," he said in wheedling tones. "I have been told that we are going on a journey, a number of us, all friends. In view of your devoted consideration for me in particular I thought that if we went together first—you and I—in fond companionship——"

"God in heaven!" screamed Segovia.

Ortega was on his feet, leaping toward the crazed man. The stenographer ran from behind the screen. But all too late. A shot split the air, and another. Morales toppled over with a choking grunt, a bullet through his temple. Mary Taylor sank slowly down. Her hands were to her breast. Her head drooped lower and lower, and as Enrique reached her it fell upon his outstretched arm, saving it from the floor. Her clouding eyes dwelt on him for the beat of a clock to and fro.

"Forgive," she breathed, and was gone on her journey.

The door was crowded with faces peering in. Ortega swept them with a withering glance. His mood was harsh, for his own judgment had betrayed him.

"You fools!" he lashed out. "Because he was not a common cutthroat you did not think to search him for a weapon!"

THE *Lincoln* lay well under a mile off the mouth of the Rio Negro. She had been towed to this position by *El Terror* after a conference between Lieutenant Norris and Admiral Terrozas, at which the admiral had imparted certain knowledge he possessed of Colonel Ludolf's plans to cover Peralta's landing. The *Lincoln's* guns were trained on the river, and her searchlights would scour it through the night. Any craft from the lumber camp that might attempt the open sea would be blown out of the water. The *Lincoln's* wings were clipped, but not her claws. And furthermore, in response to her calls, a swift United States destroyer was on the way to the scene.

El Terror meanwhile was scouting along an arc that embraced the possible landings for the *Sea Bird* on the coast. Admiral Terrozas was inflated with his conquest of the U, and inflamed with the desire to add to his patriot laurels.

CHAPTER XXIX

A COUNTER-ULTIMATUM

IN THE farmhouse Winifred stood in the subdued light of the shuttered dining-room looking out through a peephole at the scene before the hut. She wore a belt from which hung a pistol. Billy stood beside her at the companion port. A rifle was in his hand. Brewer was at the window nearer the hall. He, too, held a rifle. Old Tia Matilde sat crumpled up in a chair against the wall by the pantry door. Sam was not present. He was on guard in the front rooms lest a surprise attack come from that direction.

The heat was sweltering in the closed room, but the three at the windows were oblivious of it for the time. They had heard the words Jimmy shouted to Diego, and they saw the blow on the mouth Hecht gave his defenseless prisoner. Until then—all their talk and preparation to the contrary—the actual spilling of blood in this emprise had to Winifred seemed somehow a thing remote and without true imminence. Now, in one breath, it took on the full body of reality. She could kill that man out there!

"Oh, the coward beast, the coward beast!" she cried. "A—ah!"

Jimmy, bound though he was, had made a rush at Hecht. It was, of course, a vain effort. The German stepped aside and launched a fist into the broad of Jimmy's back as he hurtled by. It sent him pitching headlong in through the door of the hut.

The Mauser in Billy's hand was up in a flash. There was a snarling, unhuman sound in his throat.

"He'll pay for that, —— him!" he said thickly.

He was thrusting the rifle through the port when Brewer called to him.

"Don't! Later he will pay. Let us see first what Diego brings. It may decide our actions."

Billy reluctantly lowered his gun. The wisdom of Brewer's position was apparent.

"To think of Jimmy—Jimmy Perry—being knocked about in that way," he muttered.

Winifred was silent. But her eyes were flames. Brewer had gone to the outer door and was opening it to Diego. He closed and locked it after the peasant, and signed to him to enter the dining-room. He followed him in and held out his hand.

"Give it to me," he ordered.

Diego delivered to him the envelop on which Hecht had indited his ultimatum. The old man was shaking with fear and excitement. He went and stood dumbly by Tia Matilde. Brewer read out the note to the others. They were all very still when he finished, and very white. Winifred was the first to speak. Her voice was file-hard, rasping, out of key.

"I know what Jimmy meant. 'Never! Never!' We are not to surrender that man in there."

Her finger pointed to Kaufman's door across the hall. Had it been the opening to the den of a deadly reptile there could not have been more of abhorrence in the gesture.

"One hour!" faltered Billy. "One hour! It is five o'clock. At six—Mr. Brewer, we've got to give him up! They will shoot Jimmy before our eyes. It would be the same as if we—ourselves—murdered him."

Brewer did not answer. He was sunk in thought.

"If they would do it," he murmured. "If there was a way to get them to do it."

Winifred was studying him intently.

"Tell me, father. What are you thinking?" she demanded.

He looked at her vaguely, obsessed with the idea he had evolved. He spoke as though she had disputed him.

"The trouble is, Winny, it lacks a motive. Don't you see? There is no inducement for making the exchange. An old man for a young man—they wouldn't do it."

Winifred drew in a long breath. He would save Jimmy, and he would die rather than surrender Kaufman. Even in this moment of extremity a fierce gladness filled her. She ran to him and caught his hand. She bowed her head to it and kissed it.

"My father! Oh, my dear father!" The swelling note of a great tenderness and a great pride was in her voice. "I would not let you do it. Ah, no, no!"

He threw off partially his abstraction. His arm went about her.

"If it only could be done, Winny, if it only could! You could hold out, the four of you, and I—I would be to some extent canceling——"

She hushed him with her finger to his lips. Her thought was of Billy, though the boy's thought was on neither of them. It was with Jimmy—out there, bound and helpless, kicked about brutally, his life hanging on the decision they should make in here. He was at the window again watching the hut.

"They would not do it, father," Winifred contended. "And Jimmy, he would not consent. Don't you know that he would not? We must think up another way to save him. And we must not delay, father. The minutes are flying."

Billy swung around to them.

"I tell you we must let Kaufman go," he cried stubbornly. "There is no other way. They may not wait. They may shoot Jimmy before the hour is up."

"*Cuidado!*"

It was a croaking whisper from Tio Diego. He had come forward a little from the wall. His arm was outstretched toward Kaufman's room. The minister had succeeded in clawing back the slide, and was peering at them. He had overheard Billy.

"Swine!" he shouted. "You would let me smother in this accursed hole. But I have heard. *Ja!* And I have seen. I know my men. I know what they will do. Release me, and the scoundrel shall live. Release me——"

Kaufman dropped away from the opening with a squeal of fright. Winifred had snatched the pistol from her belt and fired—point-blank at him, he believed. But the bullet-hole, high above where his head had been, indicated her intent. It was to produce exactly the effect that followed; he would keep away from the door after this. Billy gritted out—

"I wish you had killed him!"

The tiger is in every woman, and it leaps forth when she is aroused. Winifred's face was flushed with the surge of suddenly unleashed passions. If Jimmy was to die he should be avenged.

"The next time——"

She did not finish, but moved to the nearest window, and gazed darkly at the hut. It was too far away for Hecht and his crew to have heard the shot distinctly. The thick walls of the house would muffle it. They were standing around discussing something in their ponderous German fashion. Jimmy was nowhere to be seen. Was he lying inside there, felled to the ground by Hecht's barbarous blow? Her heart grew hot within her.

Sam had come running up to see what the trouble was. Brewer sent him back to his post, and crossed over to Kaufman's room. He drew the bolt and opened the door, and he surveyed the minister with an oddly meditative air, as one might consider to what use he could put an unfamiliar implement offered to his hand. Kaufman did not speak. He had retired to the other end of the room completely unnerved for the moment. His fingers clutched at his thick neck as if he were stifling.

M BREWER'S expression changed. It became alert, elated almost. He closed the door, pushed the panel to, and returned with a lively step to the dining-room.

"I've got it!" he announced. "They won't dare to carry out their threat."

Winifred turned to him wonderingly, afraid to believe. Billy clamored for him to proceed.

"What is it, sir? For God's sake be quick!"

"I shall answer their note. I shall say to them that if they do not return Jimmy to us unharmed we shall hang Kaufman by the neck from the ridge-piece of the porch. We need but the rope, and that is in the yard—this old woman's clothes-line. I will go and get it, for they must have visible evidence that we are prepared to act on our word."

"And by Heaven we will!" shrilled Billy. "Only I will go, not you, sir."

He was alive with hope again. He was running to the door when Winifred stayed him.

"Neither of you shall go," she declared. "To see a man gathering in the rope would raise suspicion in them. But to see a woman do it will only puzzle them. I am going."

They protested vehemently. These men were Germans. They would as lief shoot down a woman as a man. She should not go.

Winifred made an end to argument with an imperious hand.

"I will do it! Can you not shoot if they make a move? Let me pass."

Her look compelled hem. Her step was even and deliberate. Inside at the windows two Mausers covered the hut. There would be a deadly reckoning for the Hun who raised a hand against that small, slim form.

The girl detached the line from the supports, going from post to post in a business-like manner. She coiled the line methodically as she went along. She felt singularly devoid of fear, singularly intent on this one thing she was doing. Her thoughts did not go beyond it.

The Germans were standing perfectly still, watching her. They had ceased talking. She was a dozen yards nearer them when her task, so far, was ended. She did not cast a glance in their direction. Apparently they did not exist for her. She walked back to the house with the same deliberate step, and they watched her in the same bewildered silence. The extraordinary procedure held them as in a spell. They were unable to fathom what it foretold; and it was this that Winifred had counted on.

But now that they could not see her hands she was busy with the line, working swiftly, surely. She came to the porch and paused. Brewer called to her urgently from his port in the shutter. He seemed to know what she intended.

"Child! Come in. I am in agony for you."

She did not heed him. The ridge-piece projected several inches from the porch. At the end it was hewn into a knob in a rough attempt at an ornamental finish. Winifred gaged it with her eye. It was eight feet above her from the topmost step. She hesitated, then with her whole will to succeed she cast the coiled line up at the beam. It was a ten-strike! The line fell across the beam and down on the farther side.

She pulled at the end she had retained in her hand, and a slip-noose dangled in the air. She looked, then, at the Germans, her head scornfully high, and went into the house. Even then the men made not a sound. They did not understand, for to associate the imperial envoy's neck with that pendent cord was a thing so inconceivable that it could not find lodgment in their skulls.

"Oh, girl, girl! I could kiss your shoes for that!" cried out Billy.

She answered with a strained smile, and sank weakly into a chair. Her knees all at once had given way. Brewer was at the table writing. He had slit open the envelop on which Hecht's message was inscribed, and was penciling on the inner side his counter-ultimatum.

Billy in the interim was talking rapidly with Diego, though he still held his place at the window to keep the Germans in view. A project that had been forming in his mind had taken definite shape. At a stage of their talk the old peasant drew from under his dingy shirt a long, keen sheath-knife. He felt the edge, wagging his head knowingly, and replaced it with care. In his lack-luster eyes was a gleam of cupidity, a passion that masters fear. If all went well he was a made man. He would have a farm of his own. Billy had pledged it to him in Jimmy's name.

Brewer stood up. He beckoned to Diego.

"Not yet," interjected Billy. "I want ten minutes the start of him. We have half an hour left, and I've got a plan. It may pan out. Anyway I'm going to try it. Neiderlein isn't with that bunch over there, or Landeker. I've never seen any of them before. Well, my scheme is to join them and turn Jimmy loose."

Winifred caught at her breath.

"Billy! They will find you out."

"Don't interrupt," he barked at her, and went on in sharp, short sentences. "I'm a Cortina German, and in the know. Neiderlein has sent me. News! Peralta has been taken. An American war-ship got him. The city is in arms against the Germans. Hecht is not to bring Kaufman back there. Something like that—I'll fix it up right."

"But Kaufman will see you with them. He will call out and warn them, if he can make them understand at this distance," objected Winifred.

"He won't have time. Listen now. I am going out at the front, down the hill, then across the field toward the woods. I'll be hallooing for Hecht. He'll answer. He'll have to. And then is the time to send Diego with the note. A little after won't hurt. And we will keep piling up the confusion.

"When you see me with Hecht at the hut, talking, turn Sam out the back door. Have him shake his fist at the house—yell—cuss—make a row. You will shoot at him, and he will run. Keep shooting. He can stagger as if he's hit, but he must run on. He will circle around to the hut, and when he gets there he must knock the first man down he can reach. Diego will have set Jimmy free and slipped him a gun. I'll take care of Hecht. Do you get my idea? There'll be three of us to five; four, if Diego counts. Not such a bad break for us, especially if we get the drop on them."

Winifred had risen to her feet.

"You will be killed—all of you!" she gasped.

And yet in spite of the dread a faint hope was beating at her heart.

"Have you thought of the risk, Billy?" It was Brewer's only approach to dissuasion.

There was a fixed resolve in the boy's look as he answered.

"I have. But I'm not going to sit here, and let them keep Jimmy tied up like a dog. Your plan checks them, but it doesn't give us Jimmy back. We can't go on with a stalemate forever. And they will carry him along if they decide to leave. I don't intend to wait for that. I'm off! Take this Mauser, Winifred. A pail of water, somebody. I've swum the river, and my clothes have got to show it."

CHAPTER XXX

THE FIGHT AT THE HUT

JIMMY did not go down under Hecht's blow. A rough, straddle-legged table planted firmly in the dirt floor of the hut saved him. He sprawled across it, groveled on it, and regained his footing. In the grievous heat the water rained unhindered from his face on to his fettered hands. They were swollen and numb. The stick at his back bit into him until his spine was near to cracking with it. But he minded it not. A murderous wrath consumed him. He wanted, more than life, to get at Hecht; not with any weapon of man's make, but with those nature had given him—his naked fists. He wanted to feel the impact of them on Hecht's flesh, battering it to a pulp.

The fit passed. Blind passion would not get him anywhere, and he had need of all his wits. He looked about him. There was an opening in the wall on each side that answered for a window. At the rear a door led out directly into the forest. There was no escape for him in that direction. Bound as he was it would be useless to attempt it. They would take him before he had gone two rods.

A stool was on the other side of the table. It was all that Jimmy noted of the squalid furnishings. He went around to it and sat down. It was a change of position, nothing more. It brought him little ease of body; the table was high and he could not rest even a rigid elbow on it. But from this point he could view what went on before the door and, beyond, he could see the house.

He wondered what answer they would make to Hecht's message, and if Diego had repeated to them the charge he had called after him. The man was frightened out of his skin; he might not have heard, or, hearing, might have let the words go in one ear and out the other. Would Brewer, in this event, surrender Kaufman? Jimmy prayed that he would not. It would mean that the flag must come down, and solely because of his own pig-headed folly. He cursed himself as he thought of it. He would rather die, far rather, than to live on in the knowledge that it was for him those starry folds were lowered. And yet to die trussed up like a barnyard fowl ready for the oven. . . .

They were talking in low tones out in front of the hut, possibly for the reason that they fancied he was conversant with German. Aside from this a wide stillness reigned. Not a sound of bird or beast broke upon it, not a whispering murmur from the tall tree-tops all about. It seemed like the quiet of a world hushed in a dread, expectant pause.

Jimmy saw the door of the house open and Winifred come forth. He rose, his heart in his mouth. He lost sight of her as she moved toward the kitchen, and he stepped quietly over to the window on his left that he might keep her in view. Like those others in front he was mystified by her actions. Yet he knew that some vital urge impelled her. His breath came short and hard as he watched, and it went out in a long sigh of immeasurable relief when she was once again at the door. He watched her, as did the others, cast the rope over the ridge-piece, and dimly he began to understand. Then, as she turned and for the first time cast a glance at the Germans, the whole truth burst in on him.

"That is their answer," he exclaimed. "And oh, isn't she plucky!"

He returned to the stool to think on what would follow. Brewer would send his defiance to Hecht, and then what? What would be the next move? Hecht would not dare to shoot him now, but he would keep him a prisoner just the same. Where was the way out for either side from the *impasse?*

Hecht came to the door while he was studying the problem and flung a question at him.

"Have you moved his excellency to another room?"

"Are you speaking of the man Kaufman?" counter-questioned Jimmy coolly.

Hecht gave him a poisonous look.

"I am speaking of Herr Adolph Kaufman, the Imperial——"

"Never the mind the rattle to his tail," cut in Jimmy. "No, they haven't moved him."

"Then why are the windows closed?"

"To keep the flies out, or in, I've forgotten which."

Hecht took a menacing step toward him. Jimmy did not stir, but he pinned his eyes on the German with an expression that involuntarily halted him.

"If," he said, "you have any idea of striking me again, I wouldn't, Hecht. You don't want to add to my score against you; for when I get at you—as I will—I shall stop just short of beating out your brains. Another blow, and I won't stop at that."

"When you get at me!" Hecht laughed his contempt. "If in half an hour Herr Kaufman is not released you will be lying out there with a hole in your head, Perry. That is as near as you will come to getting at me. I can promise you that."

Jimmy looked him over coldly.

"It's a waste of breath, I suppose, but I will make you a proposition, Hecht—it's your only chance to deliver Kaufman. Cut this cord and stand up before me with your fists. Do me in, and you shall have your man; I pledge my word to it. If I do you in I'm to go free. Now, if you are not entirely the dirty coward you've shown yourself to be you will take me up. If you don't, and you shoot me, you will see Kaufman swinging at the end of that rope over there the minute afterward. That's what it's for, Hecht. I can promise you that."

This monstrous statement swept the Teuton's mind of the personal implication the challenge carried. The Kaiser's envoy to be hanged by the neck like a common malefactor! It was beyond the pale of reason; it was an impossibility! He stared at Jimmy, seeking in him some evidence of impaired sanity. Jimmy guessed his thought.

"If you don't believe it, Hecht, take me out and shoot me," he taunted. "It is plain that you are not man enough to settle this thing as I've proposed. You are the kind we read about—baby-killers!"

For one instant Jimmy's life hung by a thread. The German's hand went to his pistol. He drew it half-forth from his belt, hesitated, and with an oath thrust it back. The dangling rope over there beyond had flashed on his mental vision.

From a distance in the coffee-field came a call:

"Leutnant Herr Hecht! Leutnant Herr Hecht!"

A man looked in at the door, and spoke to the lieutenant. He went out in haste. Jimmy heard the call again, nearer by, and heard Hecht answer—a harsh command, it seemed to him. Silence ensued; a wait, probably, for whoever it was to come up.

And then, issuing from the house, Jimmy saw Tio Diego. He moved sluggishly toward the hut, as though loath to arrive. There was something white in his hand—a slip of paper. All at once his step livened, but Jimmy forgot him in the amazing scene that claimed his eyes.

Billy passed before the door with Hecht. They were talking in German, Hecht gruffly questioning, Billy replying with dramatic vigor. Not for the wink of an eyelash did his glance stray the prisoner's way. They paused a little to the left of the entrance. Jimmy could catch a glimpse of Hecht gesticulating violently. The remaining Germans gradually approached the spot, curiosity drawing them.

And now Diego arrived, cringing servilely. He extended the note to Hecht, and cowered away, but not toward the house. Inch by inch, as the Germans crowded up to their leader to hear the message read, Diego neared the door of the hut. Jimmy might have been of stone for any movement that he made. A drama was being played in which there was a part reserved for him. This he understood, and he knew that presently it would be revealed to him.

Diego's back showed at the edge of the door. If a chance eye had been directed to him he was merely leaning against the wall humbly waiting for their excellencies to have their will of him. But of a sudden his back straightened. An outcry had proceeded from the house. A great voice rent the air, and pistol-shots followed. With a catlike bound Diego was inside the hut. The slash of a knife, and Jimmy was free and Diego at the door again.

JIMMY thrashed his numbed arms against his sides. He toiled with his hands, one with the other, and bit into them with his teeth until the blood flowed. Life came surging back into them, and he was at last able to grasp the revolver Diego had left for him on the table. He jumped over to the window. Sam was running toward the hut. He came on bellowing like a stampeded steer. Jimmy heard Billy's voice raised excitedly to Hecht, and conjectured that he was trying to allay the other's distrust of the remarkable proceeding.

"Billy will give me a signal—surely—surely!" Jimmy breathed.

Sam had stopped running. He was within a few feet of the watching group. Jimmy slipped around to the door, keeping close to the wall. Diego had moved away. He was standing behind a big German whose hand was on his gun. Diego's hand was in his shirt bosom.

Sam was up to them now—in the midst of them. He was laboring, it seemed, for speech. But his was not a speaking part; if he had been told what to say he could not have remembered it in this hasty rôle he had assumed. He raised his hand in an uncouth attempt at a military salute—and it and the other hand, doubled into huge granite fists, crashed full into the faces of the two nearest Germans. They went down like slaughtered beeves. With the action Billy's automatic was jabbed into Hecht's stomach.

"Now, Jimmy!" he shouted. And, "Hands up!" to Hecht.

Jimmy was already out and at work. Sam's attack had been a sufficient signal for him. Diego's man was reeling with a gushing knife-wound deep in his neck—dying on his feet. The peasant, his courage suddenly gone, was in full flight for the shelter of the woods. The fifth man had fired at him, and missed. He wheeled at Jimmy's appearance, and they both let go at the same instant. Jimmy felt a searing streak on his temple. The German's pistol-arm dropped. A strangling cough distorted his features. He doubled up and came in a lump to the ground. The other German fell over, kicked convulsively, and lay quiet.

Jimmy put his hand to his head. Blood was on it when he took it away. It had been a narrow squeak for him. He started over where Billy held Hecht at pistol-point. Sam was rising up from the two Huns he had felled. They had come to, but the negro had their weapons corraled.

"Jes' drawin' deir teeth, boss," he grinned as Jimmy passed him.

"You are a prince, Sam," commended Jimmy. "Gather up those other tools back there. As for these chaps kick them off the lot. We don't want any prisoners." To Billy he said simply—"I owe you one, old man."

"Not till you have frisked this skunk of his gun," the boy replied. "For two cents I'd save you the trouble," he growled at Hecht. "Keep those hands up!"

Thirty seconds would have covered the drama's action from the time of Billy's warning shout. But there was an epilogue to come. Jimmy devised it, and in the heat of his desire all else was forgotten—the men lying dead by the door of the hut—Kaufman—Winifred—Brewer—all things in heaven and earth but this man Hecht.

"I wouldn't have you harm him, Billy, for all the money in the mint," he said in a silky voice. "I promised him something in there, and I'm going to give it to him right now. I can't wait."

He took Hecht's pistol from him, and

his own, the one he had been relieved of at the riverside. He passed them over to Billy together with the revolver Diego had brought him. Hecht did not speak, but his eyes, flashing from one to the other, were hells of hate. Kaufman was bawling objurgations at him from his vent in the shutters. He had seen everything, and Hecht knew that his career was closed.

"Now, you baby-killer, put up your hands," Jimmy ordered.

He squared away for the German's attack. So intent was he on the business before him that he did not notice that Brewer and Winifred had come out of the house, and were in the yard watching the astounding affair. They had brought their rifles with them. Old Tia Matilde cowered behind on the steps. Nor did Billy remark them. He stood by with shining eyes. This was as it should be. Jimmy was going to wipe out in the only way possible the indignities to which he had been subjected.

But Hecht did not put up his fists. The decent art of self-defense was not his. He lowered his head, and rushed in with taloned fingers clutching for his opponent's throat. It was child's play for Jimmy, this. He leaped aside and planted a blow behind Hecht's ear that sent him plowing into the dirt.

"One!" cried Billy. "Oh, boy!"

"De Lawd bless me," chuckled Sam.

He had obeyed Jimmy literally, and kicked his two Germans into the coffee-field; and he had turned in time to see Hecht go down.

The man climbed heavily to his feet. He dashed the sweat from his eyes and, his lesson learned, he crouched and began warily circling around his foe. If he could close with him, get a wrestling hold! He would know his way then. Jimmy saw what Hecht was up to. He did not intend to let the fellow come to a clinch with him; he was not too sure of that freshly healed lung of his, and, besides, the thought of a straining embrace with the brute nauseated him.

"Come on, you Boche," he invited softly. "I knew there was no such thing as a stand-up fight in you. Come on and strike me in the mouth. You did it once."

Hecht believed he saw an opening, and rushed in. His rage carried him smashing through Jimmy's guard. But before he could make his grip fast Jimmy shot in a short-arm jab to his jaw that staggered him. It gave Jimmy the chance to throw him off, and in the same motion he got in a vicious uppercut to his chin. Hecht tottered back, spun around dizzily and dropped.

"Two!" counted Billy rapturously.

A shrill, flesh-creeping cry pierced the air. Jimmy swung around from the supine Teuton. Tia Matilde was fleeing from the porch to Winifred, her hands raised in terror above her head. Behind her, in the door, Kaufman's bearded face showed for a moment. A raucous laugh rolled from his lips, and the door was banged to.

On his last visit to the man Brewer had neglected to shoot the bolt that held him prisoner, and he had found it out. And in the living-room were loaded guns—two Mausers, a Colt, and Kaufman's own hammerless S. & W.

CHAPTER XXXI

BREWER

IT WAS a meteoric moment. Winifred and Brewer stood looking uncertainly at the closed door. The baleful occurrence seemed to have dazed them.

"To the kitchen, Winifred! Quick! Quick!" Jimmy shouted.

He grabbed a pistol from Billy and set out full tilt for the girl.

Hecht had got to his feet, but he was unarmed, and they paid him no attention. Billy started to follow Jimmy. Sam, from the background where he had been collecting the weapons of the dead Germans, ran forward. And then came what was near to proving Billy's end. With his second step he tripped and fell. The pistols piled in his hands scattered right and left. In a twinkling Hecht had pounced on one, and roaring his triumph, drew it down on the prostrate boy. But the bullet plowed harmlessly into the ground. Hecht had been a second too late. Sam fired first, not ten feet from him, and the .45 bored his body through from side to side.

"Good boy, Sam!" yapped Billy as he scrambled up and retrieved the guns he had spilled.

Sam scooped up the one Hecht had dropped, and they raced on, leaving the Hun gurgling out his life in the trodden dirt. Both Jimmy and Brewer had stopped at the man's savage cry, but before either could shoot, the negro had dispatched him.

They all crowded into the kitchen-house. It was under twenty yards from the dining-room, but the solid stone walls defied anything short of a field-piece. They had but to keep away from the window, and Kaufman would not have a chance at them. From the southeast window of his prison room he could have commanded the door had not the shutters been nailed fast; but the angle was too sharp for accurate aim through the peepholes. The situation, however, was not without its danger, and, moreover, it was humiliating. The trappers were trapped.

"It was my criminal carelessness," Brewer groaned.

Jimmy did not understand, but it was no time for futile questions. Billy and Sam were depositing their superfluous pistols on a chair. Billy turned abruptly and exclaimed:

"I say! What's to prevent Kaufman from going quietly out at the front and scooting off. He may have done it already."

This was a new thought to them, for until then it had been fixed in their minds that the minister would hold the house till another rescuing party should arrive. Neiderlein would certainly send more men, and probably head them himself, to learn why Hecht did not return to the legation. He would not know of the cloudburst, and the delay consequent upon it. Even now he might be on his way to the farm.

"Kaufman was brought here in the night," said Winifred reflectively. "He doesn't know the country it is likely. I don't think he would venture out alone; and he doesn't know how many of us he has to deal with. He may think we have some one stationed in the trees at the front to watch the door."

The answer to their problem was startlingly unexpected. Brewer had put his rifle aside, and immersed in thought was moving toward the back of the kitchen, where was another door giving into a smaller room, which, in turn, opened on a narrow strip between the kitchen-house and the precipitous hillside on the west. He passed before the window. Instantly a gun spoke and a bullet whistled through the window. It missed Brewer only by an inch or so.

"Father!" gasped Winifred, white with fear.

"He's found the guns!" cried Billy. "He is going to keep us here."

"In two hours it will be dark. Then we can do something," said Jimmy. "He can't guard all the windows at one and the same time."

"But if he gets reinforcements! Those chaps we let go will tear back to the city in their car. Neiderlein will come out with a bigger bunch." Billy wrinkled his nose, but not in comedy now. "Gee, Jimmy, it doesn't look any too good to me."

Jimmy glanced over at Brewer. He did not seem to be upset by his narrow call. He wore, rather, an abstracted air that took no account of his surroundings. He beckoned to Jimmy with a slight gesture, and Jimmy, ducking below the window-sill, went to him. Winifred, still in the clutch of her fright, leaned limply against the wall and watched them. But for a moment only. Brewer led the way into the adjoining room and closed the intervening door. He spoke rapidly and quietly.

"It is an enormity—Kaufman holding the house with the flag flying over him. It is my fault, and it is my business to find the remedy. There is a way, and I will attempt it."

"What way?" broke in Jimmy, puzzled. "The doors are fast, and the shutters are bolted on the inside."

"You have forgotten the skylight."

"The skylight?"

It shot through Jimmy's mind that all these events had affected the man's reason.

Brewer answered calmly.

"Exactly that. It is open and the ladder in the hall is up. It is not probable that Kaufman has removed it."

"Oh," interrupted Jimmy again, "but the thing is impossible, sir. How——"

"Wait!" enjoined Brewer curtly. "There is another ladder. It lies along the east side of the house. It was used, I imagine, for repairing the roof. At any rate it is there. I shall raise it, and go up in my stocking feet for a better foothold on the tiles. I will go down through the skylight, and surprise Kaufman in the dining-room. Your part is to keep him busy until I can get away."

Jimmy gazed at him in silence.

"By Jove!" he breathed at last. And then: "I believe it could be done, only how will you get from here to the east side of the house? Kaufman will shoot you down."

Brewer led him to the outer door.

"THERE!" he said. "If I can reach the edge I can claw my way along below eye-range and come up at the farther end."

"And a slip would send you to the bottom. Mr. Brewer, this is work for a younger man. I want you to let me——"

Brewer stopped him with a remonstrant hand. A flickering, inscrutable smile played about his mouth and vanished.

"I have, I think, a special strength for this," he said. "When you came to me the other day and told what was required of me it—well, it meant new life to me. It meant what a shipwrecked man must feel who sees a sail come up over the horizon when he has lost all hope—a ship flying his country's flag. I can't very well make you understand, Mr. Perry, but this work is for me alone. It is for no other."

He hesitated, and brought out a key from his pocket.

"If anything happens to me this will open my box at the Credito Mercantil in Cortina. There is money in it, a great deal of money. And there are papers. You will understand when you read them. Winifred will know what to do; it is what I shall do if I live to see this thing finished. She—Winifred—faithful through all——"

His voice broke and he did not go on.

Jimmy reached out and took his hand. He looked steadily into Brewer's eyes.

"I do not have to read the papers to understand," he said with feeling. "Between you and me and Winifred all is well, sir. You are going to succeed—Mr. Bowman—and you are going home with us, when all this is over, in honor and high regard."

Brewer shivered as with cold. His head sank upon his breast.

"You know!" he choked.

"From the first I have known; but what I did not know was that I should come to this downright liking for you. You have won it, sir, and how, it shall be my privilege to tell the world."

Brewer's head came up gradually. In his look was indeed the hope of the rescued castaway. He gripped Jimmy's hand in both his own, but he said only—

"I am going now."

"Wait one minute, until you hear the firing," Jimmy cautioned him. "You can make your break under cover of it. Good luck, sir. And remember, we are all pulling for you."

He returned to the others. Winifred mutely questioned him with her eyes. He told her in a dozen words what her father had undertaken to do.

"Now Billy—Sam—stand back from the door, and start shooting out of it when I call. Not too fast, and not together. Two shots each."

For himself, he caught up Brewer's rifle and warily poked the muzzle out of the window corner so that it very nearly sheltered him from view. Only a minute portion of his arm and shoulder showed.

"Now!" he called.

With each shot from the door Jimmy pumped one at the dining-room, praying it would find Kaufman at the port he selected for his doubtful aim. The combined effect was as if all six shots were delivered at the house. Kaufman returned hesitantly what he possibly took for a fusilade, and yet could not see where it came from. He fired once or twice at the kitchen window, and then was silent. Jimmy ran into the back room, and looked out. Brewer was gone. The ruse had diverted attention from his movements.

"If I could watch how he gets along!" murmured Jimmy.

The dining-room commanded both the front and rear doors of the kitchen, but Jimmy calculated that with a cautious step out of the rear door, and flattening himself close to the wall, he could gain the shelter of the south side, and from that point, moving back a little, he could see the roof of the big house. Ten seconds would do it.

He tried it, and succeeded without drawing Kaufman's fire. He was protected from the dining-room, but he perceived that should Kaufman take a notion to go to his own room to reconnoiter the kitchen territory he could with a slant shot pot any one who moved outside a limited area in the flank of the building. But from within this area Jimmy found that the skylight was in plain sight. And it was a degree cooler here than in the low-ceiled kitchen.

He returned in the same guarded manner, and reported his discovery. Tia Matilde would not budge. She sat crouched against the wall with the determination to remain there until all danger had passed. But the others ducked under the window to Jimmy. He took charge of Winifred's rifle and instructed her how to proceed.

"Go first," he directed. "I will be in close touch of you."

His idea was to shield her should Kaufman glimpse them.

His purpose was clear to the girl. For just a moment her eyes rested on him—on his blood-stained cheek—with soft intensity; then in quiet obedience she stepped out of the door. He was instantly at her side. Billy followed with Brewer's rifle, and then Sam. The great bulk of the negro was not so easily flattened against the wall. The crack of a Mauser came from the dining-room, and Sam sputtered an exclamation.

"O-o-o! I cudn't 'a' slipped er sheet o' writin' paper 'tween dat an' me."

THEY reached the safety zone without further incident, and they stood with their eyes on the flag hanging slack on its pole over the skylight. Billy took advantage of the respite to reload the magazine of Brewer's gun.

"I hope Kaufman doesn't start to rambling about the house," he said nervously. "It would be easy to see Mr. Brewer, or hear him at the living-room windows."

"Or he might go up to the roof. And then—if he should see father coming! Do you think he might do that, Jimmy?"

Winifred laid a trembling hand on his arm. He laid his own over it reassuringly.

"Don't think he'd attempt it," he answered. "That ladder is mighty shaky. and this move of ours will set him to guessing. He will try to figure out what we are up to, and he won't venture away from this side of the house. He will want to keep a watch on us."

"I'll tell you something you don't know, Jimmy," said Billy earnestly. "Mr. Brewer wanted to make a deal with Hecht to exchange places with you—to be shot in your place, if it came to that."

"He did?" said Jimmy very quietly. "I wish I had known it before, Billy."

He met Winifred's eyes. They were humid. He pressed her hand, and it responded. They fell quiet after this, all of them, waiting tensely for Brewer's appearance on the tiles. A tremendous stillness wrapped the earth. So still was it that they heard, or fancied they did, the scraping of the ladder Brewer was erecting against the roof.

"My Lawd, w'at's dat!" ejaculated Sam in a scared voice.

They looked in the direction in which he was pointing. Bounding out from the woods near the hut was a great, tan-colored beast, spotted black with a white breast and belly. It stopped in the open. Its long, sinewy tail switched from side to side, and its furry ears were flattened to its head.

"A jaguar!" whispered Billy. "Something is wrong or it would never come this near a house."

They gazed fascinated at the giant cat. It saw them, but it took no note of them. It held a curious listening poise. And now its head went up, and a deep, hoarse cry—*pu, pu*—issued from its throat. It bounded off into the coffee-field.

Suddenly Billy swore under his breath, and then lifted his voice in a warning shout—

"*Regrese, Diego, regrese!*"

From around the back of the stables to the right, trotting toward them, came the old peasant from his skulking-place in the woods. He had seen them gathered out there by the kitchen wall and imagined, probably, that no danger threatened; for he did not know the true state of affairs.

He paused at Billy's call, a fatal moment. A spurt of flame burst from the southeast window of the house. Diego turned to run. Another shot, and Diego rolled over and over and lay in a huddled heap. And still another shot followed. A scream echoed with it. Old Tia Matilde staggered into view. She whirled about, rocked to and fro—and there was a second motionless huddle on the ground. Matilde had come forth at the sound of her husband's name, forgetful of the hazard, and Kaufman had shot her down.

"My God, the butchering brute!" thundered Jimmy. He sprang out from the sheltering wall, and poured the five shots in his Mauser into one vent and then the other of Kaufman's windows. Billy was with him, firing in the same furious rage. There was no reply. Kaufman had emptied the magazines of his guns, or a bullet had found him.

But another sight claimed them. Brewer was on the roof. He was at the skylight. And, what they had not noticed in these last fierce minutes, a torrid air had sprung up. It rippled out the folds of the flag above Brewer. He looked down at them, and then up at the flag. For a moment they saw him thus—and were hurled flat on their faces in the roar and crash of a world-shaking convulsion.

It came again and again. They lay where they had been dashed down, bruised and stunned. They had no voice with which to shriek their fears. Each recurrent shock seemed to lift and crush them down.

Horrible beast-cries came from the forest. All about were sounds of grinding, slipping earth, of great boulders hurtling down the hill. And now descended on them a rain that held no moisture—a soft, stealthy rain of ashes borne on the increasing breeze from old Borazo, awakened fully after these many years to a devouring activity. It was an hour from sunset, but the gloom of a dying twilight was on the land.

A pause came in the shocks. It grew longer, lengthened into minutes. But the filthy rain still fell, and over in the south was a pale, ghastly glow reflected from the molten lava the volcano was spewing up from its bowels.

Jimmy put out a groping hand.

"Winifred!" he called in a labored whisper. "Winifred—Winifred!"

Her hand touched his. She had fallen close to him.

"Jimmy!" she whispered back.

"Billy—Sam!" he called.

They answered, and presently one by one they ventured to their knees, and, finally, with a painful effort, to their feet. They stared about them in the gloom, hot-eyed and horror-bound. Only a mound of stone where the kitchen had been lay between them and the house. And the house—it was but a greater mound! Part of it had tumbled down the cliff, which had been shorn away to the very foundation of the building.

The stables were gone. Brewer's car lay buried deep under the wreckage. There was not an upstanding stick or stone within their view. They were alone, these four, on a broken, barren hill-crest, the only breathing human creatures of all those that had peopled it an hour before.

"Father! Father!" It scarcely stirred the awful stillness, so low and tremulous a note it was.

Jimmy's arm went around the desolate girl's bowed form. He drew her gently to him, and her head rested on his breast. And they stood thus for many minutes in the soft, smothering, abhorrent rain from Mount Borazo.

CHAPTER XXXII

HOMEWARD BOUND

IT WAS Saturday noon. Jimmy sat with the Hon. John Henry Lane in the improvised quarters of the American legation over a tobacco shop on the Plaza Central. Jimmy had just come in. Before them lay the ruins of the three-story Hotel Europa. Up on the Calle Commercio the legation building was a heap of rubbish. But the German legation stood intact, though its doors were closed.

The death of the imperial envoy was recorded with Spartan brevity in *La Cronica*. He had been visiting in the country, and with his host was buried in the ruins of the house. This, so it was stated, was the only fact known at present. In short, the Government had seen to it that the burden of explanatory details should rest with the legation, if it cared to shoulder it.

Lane was speaking.

"It is pretty bad, James. Some forty buildings are wrecked, and two hundred lives lost by present reports. The list may grow. Now tell me just what happened out there. From the beginning, please. I've worried myself sick about you. And I see you have had a hurt."

"That?" Jimmy touched his temple contemptuously. "A miss is as good as a mile. It is nothing."

As briefly as he could he narrated what had occurred up to the moment of the 'quake. His face was very grave.

"When we were able to get our wits together," he went on, "we groped our way down through the coffee-field to the Santa Marta Road, and from there to the river and always in that hideous velvet rain of stinking ashes."

He shuddered as he recalled it.

"We waited there for ages. Black night came on. And there was another shock, but only a tremor this time. It scared us, though, I can promise you. The river had fallen so that if it had been day we could have crossed, but we were afraid to try it in the dark. And then came the lights of a car on the other side. We shouted and—oh, I'll cut it short; I can't think of it quietly. It was Enrique—good old Enrique! He hadn't forgotten us in all the tragedies of the day. On the way in we passed an overturned car. It had been caught in the 'quake. Those two Germans were under it, and dead. The road was pretty bad in spots, but Enrique made it, and took us to his home, Don Luis' house."

He drew a long breath and continued.

"Enrique told us about Mary Taylor—her death—and I knew what the telling cost him. We did not press him for particulars. By Heaven, Mr. Lane, I've been living with men since I struck in here—men! Enrique, Billy Smith, Black Sam—God bless him—and Brewer. You didn't know Brewer, I believe you told me?"

He scanned Lane closely.

"No. He never called at the legation. I did not know him."

There was a short pause. Then Jimmy said slowly:

"No matter how this Kaufman business resolves itself in retrospect, no matter whether it helped or did not help, Brewer's soul was in it. He died for it—the death of a man—under his own flag."

There was another pause. Lane broke it.

"And Mr. Brewer's daughter? You have scarcely mentioned her, James."

Jimmy gave him a straight look.

"She is very lonely, and she is very desolate, Mr. Lane. And I love her. Is it enough for me to say? Or—" his expression lightened—"shall I tell you that if I can prevail on her she will be my wife before the boat sails for home tomorrow. Tonight, if she will consent."

Lane started in his chair.

"Why—God bless me—my dear boy! Ah—er—humph, you have a sudden way with you. But a thousand good wishes, James—ten thousand."

He grasped Jimmy's hand and wrung it fervently. The ghost of a grin flitted across Jimmy's face.

"I will collect afterward," he said. "And meanwhile if you can send around to me presently four hundred dollars of the nine hundred I left with you I'll be obliged. It will be enough to buy us some presentable clothes, and get us home. There will be three of us in the party, for of course Sam will go along."

"But why not all the money, James."

"The rest is for a small remembrance to Billy Smith—after I am gone. I will ask you to attend to that for me, sir. Billy, you know, is out of a job——"

"The devil he is!" roared the Hon. John Henry. "With all the work before me now? As soon as we see you out of town, he will have to buckle to and help Whittaker. And by the way, you are lucky about the railroad. The quake did not damage it seriously. The trains can run. Mrs. Isaacs got in last night with only a minor delay."

"Mrs. Isaacs!" Jimmy stared his astonishment. "Is she back again looking for her uncle?"

Lane guffawed.

"Oh, so Enrique has not told you?" The Hon. John Henry enjoyed his surprise. "Even Ortega did not suspect her at first. I will tell you about her."

And he did, chuckling greatly. He added:

"They have had news from Terrozas today. He wired the full story. He intercepted the Peralta expedition, bagged the whole outfit, and brought them into Puerto Mono. Our gunboat settled the Arraca business; blocked the river mouth so they couldn't send their launches out. It seems also that there was a German U about, and Terrozas settled that account. He has developed into a great figure in the State. I will have particulars about the U today. Lieutenant Norris is coming up to see me."

He talked these matters over at greater length for Jimmy's enlightenment. When he concluded Jimmy rose to go.

"Well," he remarked with deep satisfaction, "I've had a small hand in one little shindy; now I'm going home home to take a hand in the big one. I've filed a cable to father saying that I'm safe and sailing tomorrow."

"Did you mention the surprise you have in store for him?" hinted the minister slyly.

Jimmy answered with a return of his former seriousness.

"No, sir. That is something I can't reduce to a telegraphic announcement. And I want to say, Mr. Lane, that when I am home again, and have seen father and Uncle Allan, you will get from them a personal appreciation of your kindness to me. As for my own thanks, I won't try to put them in words."

Lane followed him to the door, radiating pleasure.

"If it is to be tonight, James," he declaimed unctuously, "I must be informed at an early hour. I wish to communicate with Señor Ortega, and his Excellency the President. I don't know, but it may be that the President will attend. I can swear he'll want to. For myself——"

"I say, sir!" cried Jimmy; but Lane rolled on in full swing, unheeding of him:

"Of course it is my privilege as the representative of our sovereign country to give away this fair—er—a-humph—daughter of the flag. Don Enrique will stand up with you, I presume, and if perchance an attendant on the bride is desired, there is Mrs. Isaacs, a less alluring 'daughter,' I will grant, but American to the core, and——"

"My dear sir!" shouted Jimmy, struggling to keep his countenance. "I haven't asked Miss Brewer to marry me yet. I have only hopes."

"W-what!" exclaimed the astounded man.

"But I am going to ask her, inside of half an hour," Jimmy finished, "and I will let you know the result."

He left the Hon. John Henry with his mouth open in a vain attempt at speech, and went down the stairs to the street.

THEY were in the library of Señor Valera's house, and alone. The secretary was at his office whelmed in the inordinate duties the great disaster had heaped on him. Enrique was in charge of a provost-marshal's detail policing the stricken city. And Billy Smith, with a wisdom beyond his years, had removed himself to other scenes.

"Is it because it is so soon after, Winifred?" Jimmy questioned.

Her head moved in dreary negation. She was white and worn from the terrors she had passed through; and yet these were as nothing now to the sweeping sense of desolation that beset her.

"It is not that, Jimmy—what difference could it make? He is dead, and his tomb is reared above him; it is there I would have him lie. And for me, there are no barren conventions to be observed. And yet, Jimmy, it is because he is dead that I must go my way apart from you. It is because a secret is buried with him that I, his daughter, should be the last to tell. I can not share it with you, Jimmy."

"But you love me. You have said it, Winifred."

"Ah! If love were only all of life!" She clasped her hands with a passionate gesture, in which also was the eloquence of a supreme despair. "But it is not all. Honor and dishonor are in it, and pride and shame. We are prisoners to them for good or bad."

She moved away a few aimless steps, caring only that she should not see his suppliant eyes. He did not follow. He stood very quietly where he was, and he said:

"Your father, when I parted with him, gave into my keeping a key. I was to use it in case anything happened to him. The key was to his strong-box at the Credito Mercantil. He said there were money and papers there, and I was to read the papers. I have read them, Winifred."

She had turned, and was gazing at him in incredulous surprise. It was several seconds before she spoke.

"You know!" They were her father's words—the same choked cry.

He answered her, as he had her father, and his smile was infinitely tender and compassionate.

"From the first I knew it, Winifred. I told your father that I knew, and his hand was in mine at that last moment before he went on a brave man's mission, and met a brave man's death."

"You knew—all the time—and it made no difference?" A wonderful light was in her eyes.

"Did I act as if it did, Winifred?" he asked.

He held out his arms. A long moment intervened. She took a trembling step toward him, and stopped.

"Your—your father?" she whispered.

His head lifted pridefully.

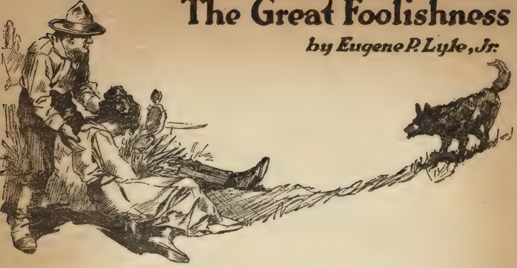
"My father will rejoice with me, for he, too, is a man."

An instant longer she hesitated, and then came all the way.

THE END

The Great Foolishness

by Eugene P. Lyle, Jr.



COME to think of it, John, Johann and Jonathan Sam were cousins—three great big fellows—and they might have gotten along very well together except for the woman. But there was the woman—this woman like a flame in the raw gold camp of Placer Sands, where men didn't go to law for what they wanted but to the sagging bulge on their hips. The gaudy jade had virtue, which, strangely enough, was the trouble. She wouldn't let herself go easy. She let it be understood around camp that only the best man could get her, so there was that question to be decided.

The woman was that kind. She wanted trouble. Tribute of trouble was wine to her red lips. She was the kind to stand by while men fought for her. Men did it, too; made ribbons of one another. Now perhaps you begin to see her, rich in sex, in animal magnificence, in sheer splendor of the flesh—a strapping, stunning creature, slender and lithe and lazy. Her mouth was a painted Cupid's bow; a versatile Cupid's bow whipped by whim, petulant, haughty, cruel or melting; and the dark, smoky eyes were heavy with challenge and slumberous mystery.

Her name was Suprema, and she fitted the name for all its crude genesis. In gilt-shaded lettering on a patent-medicine label the word had appealed to her mother's naïve soul. The word was part of the Spanish translation descriptive of the bottled remedy. "Suprema!" It had a gorgeous sound, irresistible as carmen and gold. Enough—the babe was christened Suprema; and Suprema the woman was of a glamor to match.

Suprema couldn't bother Jonathan Sam, though—not yet, not very much. Jonathan Sam liked to be care-free and wear a cheerful grin under his tousled mop. Sam wasn't denying that the woman went to his head when she came around and her perfumery was in the air. Just the same, she was thirty-seven shades too resplendent in the way of Egyptian bliss for Jonathan Sam. He'd have something more home-folksy for his, thank you. And besides, what was the use? "Old Jock"—that was John, though John wasn't old, only big and slow and florid, with a bald spot—old Jock would get her anyway.

Old Jock more than shared his cousin Sam's prophetic feeling that he, Jock, would be the one to get Suprema. Old Jock had gotten much already because he knew, or had known, how to use his fists. Thus it was Jock, and not Sam nor yet Johann, who had staked off the likeliest claims in the first rush to Placer Sands. It was Jock who had jumped other claims; who had grabbed creek frontage right and left—and God help the hindmost, including Johann!

Naturally, therefore, concerning the camp's ravishing trouble-maker, old Jock took it for granted that when he beckoned she'd come. It never penetrated his redoubtable skull that she had begun to look at Johann; that her looks were mighty provocative, too. And Jock neither saw nor heard if she sighed forlorn and artful, just for Jonathan Sam to hear. But then Jock couldn't have felt any real hostility toward Sam, anyway.

Toward Sam, Jock was more like an older brother; an overbearing bull-headed brother, and Jonathan Sam had riled and swatted him for it once or twice, though without any permanent hard feelings either way. Those two never really took advantage of one another, but without being extra friendly, either, when it comes to that.

But about Johann, now—about the other cousin—well, old Jock ought to have bothered, that's all. He certainly ought. He oughtn't to have been bull-headed and cocksure and blind as the under edge of a stone wall where Johann figured into the game. For while Jock was burly and soft, Johann was burly and hard and getting harder. Johann panned his own gravel in the rapids all day, even though he liked to smoke and be sociable of an evening, and maybe get poetic about the volcano dust in the sunset sky.

Johann might have seemed warmer-hearted and more subject to honest grief or mirth than stiff old Jock; but that was only a part of the man that Johann was, and perhaps a craftily calculated part. Sam guessed it—there were woman notions back in Cousin Johann's blond, brooding head.

The three men would scarcely have picked the same time for one of their periodical hikes back to cities and civilization. They certainly would have picked one another for companions on the perilous trek across desert and sierra. But the woman was going too. Her swarthy wanderer father, who dealt faro smiling a fixed gleam of white teeth, had himself cashed in, and the desolated daughter of chance had smoothed smoother the tight sash over her hips and expressed little wonder but what she'd be moving on.

Lone temptresses, of course, did not move on over a bone-dry wilderness so casual as all that, but it appeared directly that John was going back to bank his gold-dust and Sam largely to blow his, and she mentioned to Johann, laughing low, that she was going with them. So Johann went also. Suprema knew then that the journey would not be monotonous; she had so provided.

There were the four of them who went and also a boy, besides pack-animals and mounts. The boy was a sturdy, soberminded, industrious waif belonging to nobody. He had a portable forge and he used to sharpen the miner's tools. But the forge was packed on his little gray burro now.

At the end of their first day of tortuous plodding, they were down among the foothills, and the first night they camped beside a mountain stream. The woman had a dog-tent and quilted pads and Angora rugs, but the three men and the boy bedded themselves under the stars. Johann, sullen and suspicious, unrolled his blankets near John's.

Where they lay, and before sleep might transport them safely hence, they could hear the woman humming to herself in her tent. It was singularly disturbing. Her nearness was a palpable thing, and she was not letting them forget it. The low notes cuddled deeper in the pillow of silence, sleep-laden, dreamy, dying. At last one of the men threw off his blankets and stood up. It was Johann. His blocked-out figure strained toward the tent. The silvery blur of canvas was filmy, like a veil in the soft haze.

"Man, lie down! What the ——" growled Old Jock.

Gruff Old Jock wanted to sleep. But something peremptory was in his growl. Johann jerked back his head and his hands hardened into great sledge-like fists at his side. But Johann did not know what weapon John might have trained on him, and he muttered a bit but subsided back into his blankets just the same.

The next morning while John was trying to stake his mule where it had other views in the matter, he got a kick that put his left arm in a sling. John swore it was nothing, and sympathy only made him madder, but Johann's gaze lingered on the bandaged arm with brooding earnestness.

Afterward, at breakfast, which was spread on a flat rock near the creek, Johann kept near the woman. He was so persistent in this that he might have been goading himself by each rustling movement of her body, by the fragrance of her in each breath he drew—goading himself on to some wild and secret project. She was between him and John, indolently snipping off bits of pone crust with her even white teeth.

After a while, when it suited her mood, she let Johann have the thrall of her big, round, smoldering black eyes, and at the same time she let her hand that was nearest John come to rest over John's hand. Then, at the quick thickening of storm between Johann's brows, she lazily arched her own, as if asking him in so many words what he was going to do about it.

JOHANN'S cumbrous wits floundered. He was maddened past endurance, and, yet he lacked provocation. He had no call to attack John, who hadn't so much as noticed the woman's caress. But Johann tortured provocation out of nothing. He slapped at a gnat, missing it, and his hand was cupped to slap again when his frown focused on stolid, impervious John.

"You object, eh?" Johann roared, thumping his chest and jumping to his feet.

Johann could not pass behind the woman to get at John because of the creek and its treacherous sands at her back. So he had to go around the camp-fire. But the boy was in his way, squatted tailor-fashion by the fire mending a broken cinch-buckle and Johann lurched over the boy and then kicked him in the side. The thud of it turned Sam sick.

The boy staggered to his feet.

"You b-big bruiser!" the boy sobbed, swaying where he stood; but with the long rasp he had been using he belted Johann across the knuckles and hurled it at him.

Even when Johann swept him under foot, the boy wrapped his arms about the ankle of Johann's boot and held on.

But John—old Jock himself—was there now. John had slipped his bandage and had rushed to save the boy. John's arm was not broken, as Johann had hoped; but big as John was—inches bigger every way than thick-set Johann—he was soft and clumsy and unbelievably dense. John just shut his eyes and slugged. Jonathan Sam could have wept for the old blunderhead. The most tremendous body wallops rained on old Jock only beat a grunt out of him.

At first Johann seemed surprised and disconcerted because John could not realize that he was licked. Then it infuriated Johann because John kept on. The boy was still clinging to Johann's boot, too; but Johann savagely kicked himself loose, ran to the fire, scooped up live coals in the frying-pan, and dashed them in John's face. John fended with one arm across his eyes, blindly groping with the other hand, whereupon Johann leaped and bore him to the ground. They rolled, snarling like jaguar cats.

Jonathan Sam gaped. What had started this, anyway? Oh, yes, a gnat bite. Then he saw the woman.

She was perched on a rock like some beautiful valkyr above the obscene clamor, waiting, waiting; and in that she was a harpy, too, though damnably beautiful. But this valkyr was not interested in the souls of heroes, nor this harpy in any man's dead flesh. Rather was she the lioness feigning unconcern.

As Jonathan Sam looked at her, and thence to the two giants heaving and gouging, he had a glimmer of horrified comprehension. Here was why Johann had toiled at the sluices. Johann had been laying on muscle, content to let John put on layers of paunch. Sam marveled at the terrific singleness of purpose behind Johann's patient cunning. He stood aghast at dull, unwieldly Johann obsessed by a dream of winning Suprema and become this maniac of swift destruction.

But Sam recalled times when Johann had scowled at him, too, so that now Sam distrusted Johann's past friendliness. Everything once seeming decent and loyal about Johann began to look like treacherous calculation, and only Johann's scowl was honest stuff. Sam saw his own turn coming next. Sam was lean and rangy, but without training; Sam's fists packed no more punch than a sofa-pillow. Yet he knew that he ought to pitch in, or Johann would finish them off singly. Sam knew he ought, yet it didn't seem fair—two to one—and he chose to stand by and let them fight it out, which was a difficult business when they jostled and sideswiped him, and muttered abuse, if he yelled at them to be careful.

The boy made it hardest. When Sam thought of the look on that boy's face, the manhood in him cringed for shame. Why—why—had he not rushed in when Johann first drew back his boot? Well, Sam had not believed that Johann could do it. The thing itself had left him dazed. But if it were to do over again . . . If . . . .

A hand was laid on his shoulder, and Sam found the woman beside him. With a little nestling movement she dovetailed her fingers of both hands over his forearm. Her gaze drifted to the two men beating each other to pulp for her; then back again up at Sam, and her brows arched in that slow, questioning way of hers.

Sam twisted his arm free.

"I know that stuff! You handed it to Johann," he cried roughly.

She laughed. His anger was "score one" for her.

"Your chance, boy—baby!" she mocked. "And," she whispered, "there won't maybe never come another."

Sam frowned the blacker because his pulse leaped. He understood her all right. Let him now clean up Johann, and with John a wreck, who was there left to interest the lady? Who but Jonathan Sam?

But he was brought out of that by a groan that could not be quite smothered. He caught the woman by the arm.

"That boy lying there, go to him! What's the matter with you anyway—you, a woman? Don't you see he's hurt?"

Her smoky eyes rounded wonderingly, and Sam pushed her aside and ran to the boy. With water from the creek in his hat he bathed the boy's white, twitching face and tried to wash out the jagged gashes. From the bottom of a constricted heart Jonathan Sam cursed Johann. The woman came and stood over him and watched him curiously at his ministrations as one watches the devotee of a strange cult. Tenderness toward the weak was a strange cult for Suprema.

Sam looked up; not at her, but at the two men. There had been a pause in the struggle while John and Johann lay wheezing for breath, each with fingers grappled in the other's shirt. Now they had started again. With each buckling up of the two bodies Johann always strained to throw his weight in the direction of the creek. His purpose was clear. Once at the brink, he would suddenly break all holds and thrust John over. The quicksands would finish John. On they went, John craning his neck to snatch a glimpse of where they were bound. Once, for a second, Sam caught John's eye, bloodshot and desperate.

"Aye, Jock," Sam shouted, "these are stirrous times, old dear!"

Over they thumped again, Johann beneath; but in the instant of going over himself, John flung out a leg, dug his heel into the ground and dropped athwart Johann's chest. With his hands and his weight on top, he clamped Johann's shoulders down upon the camp-fire's patch of live coals just beneath. Johann ripped forth a howl, and became a frenzy of flopping and agony and astonishment. He had overlooked the patch of live coals in his path. But old Jock had not.

During an anxious moment Sam hoped that Johann might now be scorched back into decent citizenship. But not for long could John smother down the whale-like heaving under him. John was bucked off at last, and only by a split second got to his feet first. Johann made for the creek, and frantically doused water over his burns. But John was coming, and Johann did not wait. Snatching up a canteen, passing the woman on the way, who met his insane glare with a Mona Lisa smile, Johann scrambled up the steep face of the nearest cliff, showering his pursuer under a landslide of rock and gravel. He dropped behind a ledge, and gave himself over to nursing his wounds.

JOHN came back, battered and weary, but with a stubborn light in his eye. Among their dunnage he found first Johann's cartridge belt and pistol and then his own. Johann's pistol he tossed into the creek. His own he aimed and fired twice. At each shot one of Johann's two pack-mules dropped as if all four legs were cut away by a scythe.

Johann came pounding down from his refuge.

"What do you mean by that?" he roared. "What do you mean by that?"

"I'm meaning a fight," said John grimly, "a fair fight."

"Fair?" screeched Johann. "You call it fair, killing my mules? How'll I tote grub enough? You want to starve me—that's it—starve me!"

John nodded his hard head.

"Yes," said John, "that's it. And while you are starving some, I'll be hardening up, and that way we'll both work around to an even-Steven condition for the finish. I suppose you understand, Johann, that it's got to go to a finish now."

But Johann screeched some more about starving, and shrugged his shoulders. Johann needn't starve, John reminded him. It was only a day back to Placer Sands; Johann could go on back there.

At that the woman laughed, and Johann looked and saw that she was looking at him. The slow smile was creeping about her lips. Johann could go back and not starve; but she would not go back with him. To go back was to give her up. Johann turned again on him.

"I'll whip you now!" he yelled, coming at John. "I'll whip you on a full stomach!"

John's overstrained tendons jerked his knees as he tried to get set.

"All right—waiting for you," he said.

"Game old rooster!" Sam murmured affectionately.

That he was not soon a gone one was due to no lack of deadly purpose in Johann's seething ferocity. But Johann's knuckles were raw from the boy's rasp, and the great driving muscles down his back were drawn and stiffening from his burns. Each smashing blow he dealt cost him a fiercer wrench of pain. Only his maniacal fury kept him at it, and at that he twisted his slobbered mouth into frightful grimaces with some desperate fee-faw-fum notion of scaring John into a blue funk. But John went right on wildly pummeling and taking what came.

In the end—for there's no need to catalog the buffets of the exhausted giants—they were half-kneeling, half-crouching on the ground, each holding the other off. Thus they glared eye to eye out of puffed lids, their huge arched chests laboring, until they fell apart. They lay as they fell, eyes distended and wary.

The woman sighed and shrugged her shoulders and went back to her tent.

The little caravan did not continue its journey that day. Jonathan Sam did not reflect that he might, perhaps, have gone on alone with Suprema. Instead he would wait for his cousins until they could travel. And he would not leave the boy. Of the woman Suprema he was not observably thinking at all. She was both indignant and puzzled. She couldn't figure him out. What was it they called it in the vegetable world when some cabbage or other jumped the reservation? Oh, yes—a sport. Well, Jonathan Sam was a sport—that kind. Yes, and he was a vegetable, too!

But Sam knew the perils to the lone traveler in the arid waste they had yet to cross. They would all need each other; badly, too. Sam cursed Johann again when he thought of the desert. He almost cursed the woman. It was up to him to stay sane, to get them all safely across.

They stayed where they were that day and that night. John slept with his pistol under his hand, his stuff about him, his horse and mule staked near, and he tried to sleep with one bad eye half-open. But when he awoke at dawn he perceived Johann loading a gray burro.

"That's my jack!" cried the boy. "And he stole my grub-sack, too!"

"Look here, Jo," said Sam, "the child's got to eat."

"Is that so?" retorted Johann.

"He can't walk, either," said Sam, "the way you beat him up."

"Serves him right, the meddling brat!" sneered Johann.

John aimed his pistol.

"Sorry, lad," said John, but he fired and dropped the gray burro dead. "Sorry," he repeated, but Johann had to be licked, which was the sole issue and consideration with John.

"Quit your worrying, kid," said Sam, "I've got plenty."

Which was true. With his usual luck, Sam had six burros besides his saddle-mule. The burros had been left on his hands by two prospectors whom he had grubstaked.

"Let you ride the mule, too," Sam added. "Meant to hoof it anyway. It's time—" he glanced at Johann striding toward them—"high time I was hardening up some, *tambien*."

Johann's manner when he came was a surprise, for there was an ingratiating smile upon his discolored lips.

"Like to earn some dust, Sammy?" he asked.

Sam nodded.

"Always," he said.

"Then see here, suppose you distribute my stuff around on these jacks of yours? I'd—I'd pay you, pay you right now, Sammy."

Sam pondered.

"All right," he said. "Four ounces per day per hundred. But Jo—you'll have to deliver the freight."

"That's all right," said Johann.. "I'll go get it."

Johann ran to the dead burro, and swung its pack to his own shoulder. But he was not half-way back when John put a bullet between his feet.

"I'll line out the next one higher," said John.

Johann dropped the pack and shook his fist, yelling:

"Sam's got something to say about that. Sam knows he's got a right to freight goods——"

"Hold on," Sam interrupted, "I don't see any to freight."

"Isn't this here any?" demanded Johann.

"Not unless you deliver it."

"And let that claim-jumper pot me?" Johann raged.

"That's not my affair," said Sam. "If it was you with the pistol, you could see that for yourself."

Johann's ingratiating smile was entirely gone now.

"Huh, I get you," he sneered bitterly. "I get you—you're in with John! You're in with him, or scared of him!"

"Deliver the freight and I'll pack it," repeated Sam. "But don't expect me to take John's gun away from him."

"All right," said Johann, "all right. But wait—that's all—wait—and remember!"

He spat to underscore his threat, and wiped his hand across his mouth. Then he dragged back the pack and sorted out what he would carry and burned what he must leave behind. The latter included much that he had stolen from the boy.

With the heat of the day they were out of the foothills and halted beside the last pool of the dwindling stream from which it was possible to dip water. Beyond lay a sage-pocked waste, rimmed by a copper horizon. They rested here till night, filling canteens, water-skins and Sam's six empty kegs; but an hour after sundown found them moving through a luminous haze like lavender and stardust in solution, threading their course among endless purpled clumps of brush and yucca.

The woman rode in the lead. She was mounted palfrey-fashion on a tireless little mustang. Behind her plodded her string of pack-horses, burdened mostly with the regalia accessory to her lure. She was humming her song again, and especially was it like a siren's song as the men followed her into the trackless wilderness. Often she looked back, at first hopefully, then in haughty petulance. The first of the men was Jonathan Sam. Sam leaned against his mule as he walked, so as to hold the sick boy in the saddle. Sam might have been walking beside Suprema, of course. Undeniably she was at sea regarding Sam.

BEHIND Sam's outfit came John's saddle-horse and pack-mule, and after them trudged big John himself. At times John rode, but according as his big, soft, bruised body would let him, resolutely he walked. Old Jock was in training now. Using his pistol for menace, he jealously guarded the distance between his mule with its precious burden of food and water and the bent, solitary figure of Johann.

All that Johann had of food, he carried on his back, and a bulging water-skin atop of that. Even so, Johann carried other weight, which was neither food nor drink. Strung to his belt hung small canvas sacks, round and tight as cannon-balls and as heavy. Nuggets and dust were in them, his clean-up at Placer Sands. The sacks swayed gently, touching; then one slipped its thong and dropped. But Johann checked an impulse to kneel and salvage the scattered dust. Already he knew that in time he must jettison all the gold.

He fingered the hasp of a hunting-knife in its sheath. Imperceptibly he lengthened his stride, bringing him slowly nearer to the moving shadow there ahead, which was John's mule.

When the first rays streaked the east and the mystery of stardust and lavender had changed to a gray desolation, John stopped to fill his canteen from the water-skin on his mule. But the tumorous-like bag had gone flat during the night. Through a slit in the hide, the water had drained. A hunting-knife—Johann's—lay between two grub-sacks beneath the collapsed water-skin. Without a word John hurled himself on Johann.

Johann went down, but parrying with one arm, he slipped off his pack-straps and labored to his feet. Although John's terrific punches lacked steam, it was apparent that the first margin of difference between the two adversaries had narrowed.

Sam, hurrying back to them, stopped short to stare at something else—something half-hidden behind a cactus—a dirty grayish head with pointed ears and lolling red tongue. The beast's eyes, intent and cunning, were on the weakening combatants. Sam had a feeling that other gray forms infested the sage, and at a sound behind him he clapped his hand to his pistol. But it was only the woman who had ridden up behind him and was quietly laughing at him.

"I see," said Sam, getting mad, "you aren't scared of wolves, then?"

"Dear me, no," she laughed. "It's up to you—the three of you—to save me from them, isn't it?"

"And a job for the three of us at that," Sam retorted. "But look at 'em—the comedians! They think they're fighting for you. They haven't the sense to see they're fighting to give you to the wolves. You certainly ought to feel right complimented, ma'am."

The warriors had milled the alkali sand ankle-deep, and grappled weakly. It was another deadlock. They stumbled apart.

"Water!" gasped John. "Water—Sam!"

Sam slung off his canteen. But instantly Johann twisted a bleeding fist under his nose.

"Don't you, Sam!" Johann protested. "Without water, this big bruiser is licked, and you keep clear, Sam! You keep out!"

"But I'm selling it," argued Sam. "How about it, Jock? I'm here to sell water at one ounce of dust per one pint of water!"

John nodded and took the canteen. —— the price!

"All right, then," said Johann; "that's all right, but providing you sell me grub, too, when I need it."

"Sure," said Sam; "come to me when you need grub, and I'll sell it."

"Yes," mumbled big John, "but he'll not come to you, Sam. When he tries it, I'll wing him."

Johann scowled from one to another.

"Eh-heh!" he burst forth with vehement blasphemy. "I knew it! More of your rotten fairness! The dirty two of you are in cahoots to murder me!"

But Sam protested.

"This here shop," he said, "is open to all comers. But you've got to be a comer. If some hombre with a gun keeps another hombre from coming, that's not my fault."

"Eh-heh! Eh-heh!" said Johann, mouthing threats with his oaths as he got back into the galling harness of his pack.

When again they stopped, Johann's pack looked somewhat smaller. Not to be left behind, not to let the woman pass on forever, and to hoard his present strength against his rival, Johann had begun to throw over his future sustenance.

But John, for his part, was likewise beginning to pay. That same night John could not drag his horse to its feet. At no price would Sam risk depleting his own store of water for John's horse and mule. The mule must soon be abandoned, too, since the next water-hole was yet five marches distant. They had not gone far when behind them they heard the wolves snapping and yelping about the horse that could not rise.

Five nights later they still had not reached the water-hole. Now, the morning after, although the sun was high and the heat waves like the breath of a furnace, they were pushing on in stricken haste, all of them except Johann. The gaunt figure of emaciation that Johann had become was no longer numbered among them.

"His tracks," said John, pointing, "th—they——"

Sam nodded. When he opened his mouth, the air burned it dry. Already John's tongue was getting black. Except the boy, they all labored on foot under a pack now, even the luxurious Suprema. The boy drooped over the saddle-horn of Sam's mule, and Sam's mule was the only animal left.

The tracks they followed were of one who went heavily, whose feet dragged. Yet the tracks ran mostly straight, or if they weaved from the line, they quickly straightened out again. The pursuers could not cease to marvel at the indomitable will of the man.

"He was the first to fall last night," persisted John.

Latterly they had been making camp where the first among them fell. Last night it had been Johann, but this morning when they awoke they had found him gone. Greater than fatigue, an insensate purpose drove the man.

"I tell you," cried Sam, "he wants to get there first to fill his water-skin. You mightn't let him, you with your gun. What else?"

John touched his tongue to his fiery lips.

"Then what are we hiking after him like —— for?"

"God, Jock, he wouldn't! He wouldn't!"

"Wouldn't? Sam, if you don't know the skut yet——"

"But he'd need dynamite—giant-powder. He couldn't wreck that water-hole unless he had——"

"Yes, he could, if he's got plenty of time. Just with rocks he could——"

"Hurry, then! We haven't a full canteen left. Take the girl's other arm. She——"

She was about all in, as to that. But note that Jonathan Sam thought of her now as the girl, not as the woman. The change dated from about the time she began leaving off her perfumery. Her regalia was back there, too, strapped to the skeletons of her pack-horses, long since picked clean by the wolves. Suprema the opulent and barbaric had come down in the world along with those who would win her. And she had left off the animal lure as well. It had Sam backed to the guards.

"I declare, Sue," he burst out, after deep pondering, "I don't get you at all, any more!"

Surprise as much as a hummock of dust made her stumble. Half-jeeringly he had used to call her "Miss Supremacy." Now it was "Sue." Moreover, she liked "Sue" better, and she wouldn't have before.

"How, Sam? In what way?" Her tone was eager.

"How in thunder should I know? But you seem—well, somehow—cleaner."

AT THE word, the crimson swept into her burned cheeks. But a swift glanced showed her that he was entirely serious. Cleaner? Well, it did sound like a joke, when she looked down at herself—a disheveled thing in grimy khaki blouse and skirt who plowed along somehow in a cloud of whitish-yellow dust.

She thought of scented baths, of the lost softness of her skin, the one-time rounded fulness of her slender body, the clinging enticements of gossamer weave and butterfly tints, and the sensuous ease of her blood lazily coursing. And now Jonathan thought her . . . She laughed, and it was a queer kind of laugh. But that was because she had his meaning, which was more than Sam did himself.

"Sam," she said, and hesitated. "Anyway, Sam, I hope you are right. I—I hope I am."

He started at the yearning in her voice.

But his mule had stopped stiff-kneed in its tracks, head down, body gently weaving. As Sam reached for the boy in the saddle the mule's forelocks curled backward and it was down—finished.

"More of the same," sounded John's cavernous rumble. "Lump o' Rock already in sight, too!"

Sam grimly waved John on. His trained eye had also marked where the slate-green of the yucca trees was possibly a little higher and a little thicker—meager promise of an oasis and water.

John nodded and stalked on alone. Johann would be at the water-hole already—had been there, perhaps, with time enough to do the thing they feared.

Sam ran, overtook John, and gave him his canteen.

"All, Jock! Drink it all! Get there quicker—go!"

John tilted the canteen to his lips, but did not stop. Sam turned back to Suprema and the boy. Behind them, in among the sage, he saw ghostly gray scavengers sniffing toward the fallen mule. But there would be no more carcasses to stay them, that is, unless . . . .

Sam's lean face was hard and drawn as he hastened back. He steadied the boy, and would have helped Suprema as before, but she shook her head impatiently and put herself on the boy's other side to help with him. Her act in doing this brought back Sam's perplexity.

"What's this new stuff of yours, anyway, Sue?" he demanded. "Have you gotten human, or what?"

"I don't know, Sam, what it is," she said. She was as helpless in her own bewilderment about it as a child.

There was a silence as they fared on in the torrid glare.

"After all, Sam," she began again with a strange shyness upon her, "after all, it's only fifty-fifty. You had me bothered, too, Sam. Oh, but not any more. No, because I got it at last."

"It—what?"

"Of course," she said, "your being out for yourself—that was perfectly intelligible to me. It's what makes all of you as legible as—as the 'one' on a dollar bill."

Out for himself? When Sam thought what he had charged poor old Jock for water, for freight, for riding a donkey, he blushed to the back of his neck. He had Jock's dust to the last sack, now safely cached with his own beside the trail. He had back his treasury stock, which canny old Jock had once bought of him. He held as security a block of shares in Jock's own claims, for now it was Jock who owed him, and not he Jock. These transactions had been most gratifying.

"Yes," Suprema went on, rather drearily, "your selling water at ten times its weight in gold was quite comprehensible, but your giving it away, giving it to the boy—Jonathan Sam, that had me stumped for fair!"

Sam's grit-laden brows knitted. He remembered surprising her puzzled eyes on him as if he were a bug or a celebrity. Usually it had been when he was doing something for the boy and not thinking of her at all.

"I don't suppose," she said in a faintly rueful tone of reproach, "you ever did get a girl so pestered, or ever will again. You certainly were one continuing riddle, Sam."

"Riddle, eh? Well, what's the answer?"

"The answer? Why," she cried, "it was that simple I couldn't see it. It was only that maybe you weren't out entirely for yourself after all. Sam, it was something so clean, stark, staggering new to me that—that——"

"Wait!"

Under the merciless ball of fire hung in the sky, the boy had gently sighed and gone limp between them. With a swift backward glance for wolves, Sam lifted the frail bundle across his shoulder and kept on. The woman's eyes slowly filled, but they were not puzzled, not any more. He looked down at her. Yes, she was crying.

"Strength," he heard her saying, "strength," like a bitter refrain. "How I have worshipped it—just strength—always—and I never knew what it really was! And when I did understand—Sam, Sam, it was too—too gorgeous for me all at once. And then—God knows I'm not mushy, Sam, and more's the pity, but—well, it choked me up, and—and you can call it new stuff if—if you must, Jonathan Sam."

He was filled with sheer wonderment.

"I reckon," he said, "you'll have to try to forgive me, Sue. Lord help me, how was I to know you'd change so?"

"Changed?" she cried. She brushed back flying ends of hair to look at him. "You think so, Sam? Oh, maybe it's true, then! Maybe—maybe I'll make the shore yet!"

"If any of us do, Sue."

"You mean the—wolves? If the wolves don't stop us, don't you?"

The wolves, yes. But there was Johann first. In his mind's eye Sam saw again a thin ribbon of water trickling down the face of a rock, slowly filling a shallow basin of stone. He imagined some haggard desert-rat crawling to that thread of life, but to find the basin shattered, the seam of the rock a gaping fissure, and the flow rising no higher than the sand. And now a maniac in his despair and his hatred of his fellow-beings was at that shrine of existence—there alone, frenzied, resourceful. There alone, unless old Jock reached him in time!

"Make it or perish! Make it or perish!" Sam's heart beat the taps.

But just because of the lengthening odds Sam's zest for the dizzy gamble of life was whetted to a keener edge. His crushing burden, pain, and the torture of effort—none of it could down the eternal buoyancy of gay adventure in Jonathan Sam.

In the arid, endless grove of sage, Lump o' Rock grew well defined at last, a craggy dorsal reef in a drab, dead, scum-strewn Sargasso sea. A mountain had thrust its peak through the sand to become one more synonym in the vocabulary of hope.

They were close to it, so close that to Sam's vigilant ears came the crackle of twigs tramped under foot. Of the cause, however, he saw nothing. A chute ran up into the rock; cactus and desert-grass were thick on it, and behind the tangled fringe some sort of struggle was going on.

Sam dropped off his pack, and carrying the boy, labored on. The girl fell behind—vaguely he knew that she stumbled. With head down, he fought the undertow of sand between him and the rock. He heard staccato gasps and his thought was that even yet he might be in time, when—not in front but back of him—a shriek of terror jerked taut every nerve in him.

THE WHIRLED, pistol drawn, unaware that he had let the boy slip to the ground. He beheld Suprema running toward him, her arms raised. Close beside her a wolf ran leaping at her throat, snapping its jaws. Farther back, sniffing and cautious but huddling for the rush, crouched the dirty-gray pack of wolves. The hem of the girl's dress caught on a broken stalk of cactus. Dragging it, she went down on one knee. Her arms as she fell she held outstretched toward Sam. There was an instant when the animal's forepaws were on her skirt; when, also, Sam fired in air. The pack broke, scattering, vanishing among the sage, their leader last.

The girl's right sleeve hung in ribbons from the shoulder, and her white arm passed 'round the man's neck as he stooped and swept her to her feet and held her.

"You are my girl!" he said. "My girl—do you hear?"

Her arm tightened about his neck.

"Sam, it was you from the first," she informed him; "but I could not make you so much as try to get me—you—the strongest and dearest!"

"The strongest?" he echoed in scorn. "H'm, just so."

His scorn was for himself, because he alone could not bring her safely through. He needed big John. He might do without Johann, but he did need big John, or Suprema and all of them would go down before the wolves. Which was reason enough why John and Johann's glorious orgy of mayhem should come to an end.

But they were still at it, John and Johann. Sam had forgotten. The girl's peril had made him forget. But this was her peril, too. He put an arm about her and together they lurched and buffeted through the sand toward the water-hole.

This time no sound rose from behind the matted growth, no trampling of brush, nor hard-drawn gasps. The stillness was ominous and ghostly. They found the gap, a threshold packed hard by the converging tracks of desert prowlers. The half-shaded place into which they stumbled was as still as a church. But they did not think of that. Water was all their thought. On the first mouthful to burning membranes their souls were centered. Their gaze sought the face of the rock at the end of the chute. There they should see a tiny pool in a basin of stone. Then realization petrified them in their tracks. They remembered. Johann! Johann had been there!

Of him they saw nothing. Nor of John. But of Johann's handiwork there was that which figured death—their own. The face of the rock, for a height of two feet and as wide, was broken down, the débris filling the hollowed stone at the base. Johann must have had dynamite! And yet the hole in the rock did not look like a "shot."

On his knees, groping for a trace of moisture that might betray the rock's severed artery, Sam threw out first a cold chisel and then a farrier's hammer? Now where on the desert had Johann picked up a cold chisel and a farrier's hammer? Sam recognized them. They had belonged to the boy. Johann had found them in the boy's kit; had foreseen his need of them here. Food and gold Johann had cast away, but tools for cutting the life-thread of his fellow creatures were more precious to him. Sam brought his hand out dry, and looked up at the girl. Now that they knew the end, a warping grin twisted his mouth.

He wondered, though, at the way her eyes widened. He wondered what she was staring at. Suddenly he thought he understood, for he thought she was going mad. Well, maybe it was better. Better for her, poor kid! One arm she held partly raised, extended downward. The hand quivered from the wrist like a leaf, yet he knew she was pointing, pointing down at him. Her lips, cracked and flecked with dried blood, were parted, and her slack jaw trembled. Suddenly—

"Water!" she screamed, and slued over upon him in a heap.

He gathered her to him with a bitter and defiant tenderness. But gradually he became aware that her mouth was pressed against his shoulder, that it was held there and when he felt a fold of the cloth drawn between her teeth, in a kind of pitying horror he forced back her head. Then, he too, stared. Her lips were wet—freshly wet! He frowned deeply, with angry concentration. He must not hope—it was too dangerous. But why were her lips wet like that? He put his hand to his shoulder. The cloth was wet, too; cool and wet, so it was not perspiration. But what had made it wet? What had he been doing to make it wet? Well, he had been groping in the rock. He did it again, and noted that the point of his shoulder was jammed against the upper edge of the little cave.

"God," he murmured, "God grant——"

And, daring all, he laid the palm of his hand on the rock where his shoulder had pressed. At once moisture gathered between his fingers. He removed his hand. A narrow ribbon of water, so thin that it was scarcely a film, coursed down the face of the rock. At the edge of the rock it fell drop by drop. So, after all, the murderous beast, Johann, had not tunneled in deep enough to cut the fine ascending thread! Johann had again clumsily miscalculated.

"Sue," he whispered. "It's all right!"

He plunged his hand into the débris. The fragments of rock were flooded. The stone basin was intact! They had only to clean out the basin, and wait while the drops fell one by one.

But why wait? Let them find Johann's water-skin and canteen, which naturally Johann must have filled before beginning his labor of destruction.

Canteen and water-skin, and both filled, they did find after a little search within the fringe of brush; but at that spot they stood and gazed down on Johann and John lying there—yes, and also the boy.

The three still forms lying there were unspeakably horrid because they were human. Had they been stuffed lay figures for the setting of a desert picture, they would have been only grotesque. As it was, they were too grotesquely hideous for reality. They were too wildly disordered, too shrunken of flesh and protuberant of bone; the coating of alkali dust was too spectral; the caked, festered wounds were too natural—as a waxworks horror they overreached. But they were not wax. They were John and Johann and the boy, and it was the finish of the fight.

The finish—but to associate the idea of victory and a victor with it was but a grisly straining for humor. Johann was lying on his back. His gaunt face was upturned, his tongue was bloated between his parted teeth; and half-across his chest lay John, face downward, fingers of one hand curled as they had slipped from Johann's throat. The boy had had Johann by an ankle at the last. He lay so now.

Sam's features hardened into a grimace.

"John's fight!" he announced.

Two pointed ears vanished behind a rock at his muttered words, and they heard the startled wolf making off through the brush.

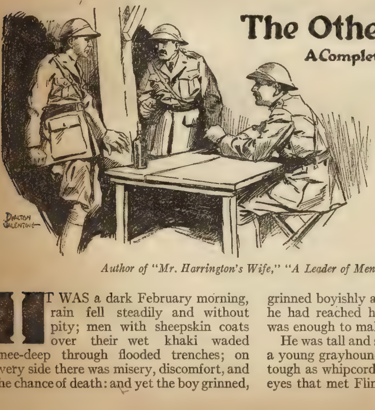
"Wait, and you'll get us all, you fellows," said Sam.

An exclamation from the girl brought him 'round. She was kneeling beside the boy. She motioned excitedly, pointing to Johann's canteen. Sam snatched it up and ran to her.

"His heart—feel, maybe the others——"

It was true. The boy's heart fluttered under the pressure of finger-tips. And it was true of the others. Sam and the girl set about to revive them. They—all of them—might now win through. They had food enough, and water—and together they'd match the desert and the wolves.

"But there'll be no more fighting," declared Jonathan Sam.



The Other Side

A Complete Novelette

by W. Townend

Author of "Mr. Harrington's Wife," "A Leader of Men," etc.

IT WAS a dark February morning, rain fell steadily and without pity; men with sheepskin coats over their wet khaki waded knee-deep through flooded trenches; on every side there was misery, discomfort, and the chance of death: and yet the boy grinned, grinned boyishly and cheerfully as if at last he had reached happiness. That in itself was enough to make Flint curious.

He was tall and slight, built on the lines of a young grayhound, straight-backed and as tough as whipcord. He had fair hair, gray eyes that met Flint's gaze steadily with no sign of nervousness, a thin, freckled face with a touch of color still showing in the cheeks, a short straight nose, and a firm mouth that was forever breaking into a smile; and his smile seemed to be trying to explain that though very young and insignificant and unworthy, he wanted to make friends and learn his job, whatever that job might be, and please everybody.

He looked, in fact, exactly what he was, a boy who in other times would have been thinking of nothing more important than football or next season's cricket, or the 'varsity in the Autumn, certainly not of war or shell-fire or the necessity of leading into action men older than himself.

But there was something about him, something reliable and straightforward and altogether efficient that made Flint glad that he was to have the boy in D Company.

"Are you Captain Flint, sir?" he had asked. "I was told at the Q. M. stores I was posted to you. Is that all right, sir?"

Flint, who had been making his way slowly and with difficulty along a wet and badly battered communication trench leading from the front line, halted and steadied himself on a half-floating duck board.

"Let me see, you're——"

"I'm Derrick," said the boy, smiling.

"Oh I understand now." Flint thrust out his hand. "I'm glad to see you. Rotten weather, isn't it?"

"Beastly."

"Why didn't you wait till tonight and come up with the ration party?"

"I don't know, sir. I thought—well, I thought now I'd got here I'd better join the battalion at once. There was nothing much for me to do in Sailly, anyhow."

"A miracle!" said Flint with a half-smile. "A miracle! So he comes here—to this; thinking he'll find jobs and things and the war waiting to begin. I am even more glad to have you than I said I was."

The boy reddened and then laughed.

"It wasn't that, sir, really, but——"

But Flint stopped him.

"You come along with me and I'll show you the underground palace known as D Company Headquarters. And don't you be ashamed because you're keen, son. I like 'em keen. We're in the supports at present, back a bit, but we go into the front line tomorrow."

"Have you had a bad time of it lately, sir?"

"Fairly hellish," said Flint quietly. "It's a rotten sector, of course."

"What kind of a crowd have you got opposite?"

"A particularly poisonous brand of Prussian. —— them!"

Flint spoke as one who had suffered yet bears no bitterness.

"Hope they'll not celebrate my arrival, anyway," said the boy.

FLINT, rendered critical by sixteen months of actual fighting, was pleased. To become possessed of a subaltern of the new army who was not only keen—that in itself was a common virtue—but who knew his job savored of the miraculous. Flint himself, a second-lieutenant of three years' service at the outbreak of war and now a captain and in command of a company, had all the regular officer's instinctive distrust of those who had obtained commissions merely because their country was at war and needed officers.

To his mind no one could hope to make an officer, much less an efficient officer, unless he had had his eighteen months at Sandhurst followed by the long and gradual breaking in with a regular battalion. Nor could he hope to learn the ways of the army, its traditions and customs, the duties and obligations of an officer after serving for a matter of months only. It was impossible on the face of it. More often than not, Flint's strictures were justified.

But Derrick was of a different type. Here, as Flint soon discovered, was efficiency in the highest degree; eagerness to do not only his own work but the work of others as well, an eagerness that Flint curbed most promptly; enthusiasm and an instinctive understanding of his men, combined with sympathy and tact and a sense of humor that was priceless at such a time and in such a place.

Flint, while purposely sparing in his praises, announced after two days' observation that he had in Derrick the best subaltern in the battalion.

"Or, if he's not the best at present," he said, "he will be soon. He can't help it. He's got it in him, and that's everything."

"Another of Flint's finds," said some one. "Wait till he realizes what the war's like, Flint! Wait till he's been shelled to blazes! Wait till he goes over the top! Why not try him, Flint? Take him out on patrol."

"I will," said Flint. "I'm going to take him out tonight to have a look at the Huns' new wire."

And as Flint had promised so it was. That night he took the boy out between the lines.

It was cold and very dark, the rain had ceased, at intervals stars showed between the gaps in the driven clouds, and the wind moaned shrilly through the barbed wire across No Man's Land.

There was little shelling, but occasionally bursts of machine-gun fire from the German trenches swept the open ground between the lines.

Flint and the boy crept slowly along the outskirts of the maze of German wire, every now and then lying motionless in the mud as the star-shells hissed upward.

Once Flint heard a little choking noise and glancing back had a momentary glimpse as the light waned, of the boy's face, white and drawn, as he stared into the ghastly wide opened eyes of a dead Highlander hanging from the wire. But almost immediately another star-shell showed him to all appearance unmoved, gazing toward the German trenches, and Flint knew that he need have no fear.

A little later the boy gripped him by the elbow and they crouched down and waited while four big Germans passed them with slow and stealthy tread.

When at last they reached the friendly shelter of a small wet dug-out that smelt of rats and stale food and damp trench-coats, and a sleepy batman had set two mugs of hot coco on the rough plank table Flint turned to the boy——

"Well, kid, how d'you like it?"

"Oh! all right, sir. I wondered whether I ought to have put a bullet through the last of those four Huns, though."

"—— good job for you—and me—that you didn't!" said Flint lightly.

"The clumsy blighter only just missed treading on me. I suppose they've a gap in their wire just about where we were lying. I wonder if their trenches are anything like as mucky as ours."

Flint smiled.

"Maybe you'll have a chance of comparing them, kid, before you're very much older."

"Hope so, at any rate," said the boy. "If I don't, I'll—" He broke off with a laugh. "It's rather good sport, really, that kind of exploring, isn't it? You never know what you're going to run up against; dead men, listening posts, patrols, anything." And the way in which he spoke showed that he was in earnest.

"Good Lord!" said Flint helplessly. "What a God-forsaken idea of sport! Weren't you scared at all?" Flint, a believer in straightforward questions, watched him curiously.

"Scared!" said the boy. "No."

"Not even when you saw that poor devil on their wire?"

"No, sir. I don't think I was." He hesitated as if trying to remember his own feelings. "I didn't like it, of course."

"I'm glad you're with us," said Flint. "You've brought us luck."

"Me, sir! How?"

The surprise in the boy's face was very real.

"We've scarcely had a shell over since you arrived. And that's something to be thankful for these days, I can tell you."

"Did they *strafe* much before, then?"

Flint stood up and began to button up his coat.

"*Strafe!* Rather! From mornin' to night. And they'll do it again, too! You wait and see. But they don't get much change out of our fellows. I tell you, kid, they're great—absolutely. And the sooner you learn it the more use you'll be to the battalion. Well, I must be off now. I'm going to have a look at that new sap they're digging. You'd better turn in while you've the chance."

Some hours later, in the middle of the forenoon, Flint engaged in earnest conversation with an artillery officer came upon Derrick seated on the firestep poring over a trench map.

"Ah, there he is. Look, Garnett; mild-looking youth, ain't he? You wouldn't think to see him now what a fire-eater he was. He's only got one ambition, and that's killing Huns. That's why they let him come out. Don't be afraid of him, Garnett. Shake hands and be friendly."

"Pleased to meet you," said the gunner. "Is Flint working you to death? He always does, you know. No subaltern can stand him for very long."

Flint chuckled.

"Lord, work him to death. He's our miracle. Works for the fun of the thing. The kid knows about as much as all the rest of us put together already. You ought to hear him talk about the use and misuse of artillery in trench warfare. He'd make even you sit up, Garnett. Tell him all about those guns of yours, and you'll both be happy."

"Are you interested in artillery work?" said the gunner.

"Yes, sir—I am."

"Like to come and have a look 'round the battery some day?"

"I would—very much."

"Well, you trot along next week when you're out of the trenches, and I'll show you a thing or two that'll surprise you. We've got some new gun positions that poor old Fritz is breaking his heart over. He's been trying for two weeks to find 'em and he hasn't spotted us yet."

The boy's face lit up.

"I'll come just as soon as I get a chance. I've never seen a battery in action; except in the distance, of course. It's awfully good of you to ask me, sir; it is, really."

Flint watched him solemnly. Then he laughed. An enthusiast himself, nevertheless he found enthusiasm in others a trifle bewildering.

"Derrick," he said. "I often wonder what on earth you'd have done if there hadn't been a war on. Don't you ever think of anything besides soldiering?"

IN THE front room of the small farmhouse that served as company headquarters and officers' mess Flint was writing letters home and listening rather against his wish to the snatches of talk from three of his subalterns.

The room itself, long and narrow and lit by candles, was furnished with a big table from which the remains of dinner, coffee cups and glasses, a plate of apples and a tin box of plain chocolate had not yet been removed, a tall and hideous dresser covered with crockery and burnished pots and pans of copper, and a mahogany chest of drawers on the top of which were books, a stuffed partridge in a glass case and a couple of .75 shell cases. The walls, from which the paper was peeling in large damp patches, were adorned with vividly colored battle pictures from the illustrated papers, a multitude of photographs; some, single portraits, and others, wedding groups; framed certificates relating to the army and diplomas from school granted to one Elise.

Seated around the little coffin-and-urn-shaped stove were the three subalterns, smoking and talking and laughing.

Nine struck from the clock over the mantel-piece.

"Where on earth's the kid got to?"

Flint looked up from the far end of the big table at which he sat.

"Chuck me a cigaret, some one, please. Who, Derrick? He ought to be back by now. He's had time enough to inspect twenty batteries."

"The kid's a good chap, of course, but he's crazy, all the same."

Flint lit his cigaret.

"I tell you what it is, young Stratton, if you knew one-half what the kid does you'd be just about ten times as much use as you are at present."

Stratton laughed easily.

"Can't help it, I'm afraid. And we aren't all built the same way, anyhow."

"I don't know why," said Flint, "but there's something about the kid that you can't help liking. He's so everlastingly keen, for one thing. Ever heard him ask questions? He wants to know everything, how and why and when? You daren't laugh at him, either."

From the eastward there came the dull throb and rumble of heavy guns.

"Listen to that!" said Flint. "There's the devil of a *strafen* going on, eh! They've been giving our trenches hell ever since we came out to rest."

There was the sound of footsteps outside and the murmur of voices. Then the door opened and Derrick entered the room, wet and smiling.

"Hullo!" said Flint. "Where the blazes have you been? What kept you? They've got some dinner hot for you in the kitchen. Does Smith know that you're back?"

"I've had a top-hole time of it," said the boy. "Seen everything." His white teeth showed in a sudden triumphant grin. "Everything. And I don't want anything to eat, thanks. I'm not hungry."

"Maniac!" said Stratton. "And he's walked about twenty miles."

"I haven't, either. Came back most of the way on a limber wagon, too. They were shelling the cross-roads like one o'clock and the driver had the wind up."

He tossed his soft cap on to a chair, smoothed back his fair hair and wriggled out of his wet trench coat.

"By Jove, it's been great. Simply great. Those gunners of ours are wonderful. Hullo, Smith! I'm not hungry, but you may leave it if you like." Smith, Flint's batman, a stolid, square-jawed private, had entered with a plate of roast beef and vegetables. "Talk about being efficient," the boy went on quickly as though unwilling to let the attention of his audience wander, "I tell you we aren't in it. The infantry's all right, of course, but——"

Flint stabbed viciously at the blotting paper with his pen.

"Shut up!" he growled. "Look here, kid, if you go on to say you'd rather have been in the artillery I'll choke you. Understand! You're in the infantry and don't you forget it."

And although he smiled, Flint of a sudden felt a curious irritation come over him, the reason for which he could not have explained. That any one, above all any one in his battalion, should compare the artillery with the infantry with all their hardships and sufferings seemed almost sacrilege. For to Flint, who had seen his own battalion wiped out three times over since that Sunday when they had gone into action at Mons, the infantry represented the finest branch of the service, the backbone of the British army which had been sacrificed to save Europe from destruction.

He watched the four subalterns curiously as they chatted and laughed around the fire; Stratton small and light-hearted and restless, a student of *La Vie Parisienne*, a creature of impulse, never serious even when most in earnest; Mason, a Westcountryman, slow-moving, ponderous of thought, and sound as the granite of Exmoor; MacDermott, a big, raw-boned Irishman, much older than any of the others, a silent man who spoke seldom and then never about himself or his past; and Derrick, tall and slight and wholesome-looking, thoroughbred to the tips of his fingers, the youngest and the most reliable of the four.

AND as Flint sat at the table staring idly across at the stove he wondered rather sadly what the future might hold in store for each of them. Flint's creed was simple, unorthodox perhaps, but of a high standard. That it was out-of-date according to modern ideas he himself acknowledged rather proudly than otherwise. Briefly, to his mind it were better by far to be killed or to suffer untold torments in battle, to be maimed or disfigured, to lose sight or limbs, fighting for one's country than to live out one's life in selfish peace and luxury and safety without having risked anything.

Few of those who had landed with him in the Summer of 1914 were still alive. They had died at Mons, at Ypres, at Givenchy, at Festubert, at Loos. It was the best who were taken—always. Would any of those in the small farmhouse last the war through? Would they see the Summer green of the poplars along the roadside? Or the poppies and cornflowers at the back of the trenches? Or hear the lark's song in a lull of the guns? Or watch the brown-and-gold leaves falling in the Autumn?

And, though of a practical nature and by no means given to sentiment, Flint shivered. The best were always taken, of course. It was hard, but it was war.

"*B'r'r'h'!* I'm cold. Some one tramping in the mud over my grave, I suppose. —— him! Thank the Lord there's no working party and we can spend our last evening under cover. Eat something, kid; you won't get another decent meal for more than two weeks so you'd better make the most of your opportunity now."

There was a light knock at the door and a plump thick-set Frenchwoman with dark hair and a worn, weather-beaten face came in.

Stratton waved a friendly hand.

"Hullo, *madame!* How goes it? *Comment allez vous çe soir? Bon, eh?*"

The French of the British subaltern is, though limited, expressive.

But there was no response, no voluble outburst of mixed patois and soldiers' English as was customary with madame, and a strange and uncomfortable silence settled on the little room. The five officers stared at the Frenchwoman without speaking, only the clock on the mantel-piece ticked on hurriedly, as though bent on catching up what was gone forever, and the roll of guns sounded angrily through the storm.

For madame was crying. She was no beauty at any time was madame: hard work and worry and the raising of many children had robbed her of what looks and figure she might have had in the far-off days of her girlhood when monsieur had led her to the altar. Her eyes were red and the lids swollen, great tears trickled down her mottled cheeks, her lips quivered and her bosom heaved with sobs.

"Good God!" said Flint jumping to his feet. "*Madame, qu'est-çe que vous*, —— it, you fellows, what's the word—can't some one stop her?"

MacDermott gave a shrug of his big shoulders.

"Poor creature, leave her alone, Flint. If you let a woman have her cry out—so I've heard—she'll be the better for it."

"I knew a girl once," said Stratton, and broke off abruptly, very red in the face.

"*Madame*," said Flint desperately. "*Dis-toi, donc*—tell us what's wrong. *Pourquoi êtes-vous si triste?*"

And then between great bursts of sobbing, madame told her story.

"For the country—he is dead in *bataille—mon fils! Keel*, you say it: my son Pierre."

"Lord!" said Mason. "What rotten luck! —— this war anyhow! —— it!"

The Frenchwoman continued in a low broken voice, weeping quietly, standing quite still in the center of the room, her fingers twisting in and out of her apron. Her son Pierre was dead at Verdun. One had brought her the news that evening from Pierre's wife at Bethune. They had been married a year, and Pierre was dead. And the baby not a month old. Whom Pierre would never see. And now—with Pierre—all were dead.

Her husband had died first, at the Marne. And then three sons. Such good boys. And now Pierre at Verdun, the best. Also her daughter's husband. All dead—each one of them. What was left for her? Nothing, only death. The good God might take her whenever it pleased Him. She would pray that her time might not be long. She was alone now, all alone in the world and once she had been happy. It was the war—the war that was wrong and cruel and wicked—that had robbed her.

THEY did their best to comfort her but what comfort was there in words when she had lost all that made life possible.

A lump came to Flint's throat.

"But what would you, *madame? C'est la guerre*. Your son died for his country. He gave his life for France."

And, strange though it seemed, Flint's few, halting sentences brought comfort. Of a sudden, madame drew herself up proudly to her full height, her sobs ceased, her hands dropped once more to her sides, and she gazed about her nervously, as though afraid lest she had offended.

"*Pardon, messieurs*," she said.

Her dark eyes rested with a tender, wistful expression, on Derrick.

"*Pauvre petit!*" she said softly and from the way she spoke she might have been talking to one of her own boys—perhaps in her own mind she was. "So young—and your mother. The poor mothers!"

As though it were the most natural thing to do, without showing any trace of embarrassment, she put her hands on the boy's shoulders and kissed him tenderly on either cheek. Then she went out, crying softly into her apron, feeling her way with her outstretched hand. Flint closed the door.

The boy's face was very red and he turned and walked over to the stove.

"Well!" said Flint grimly

"Well," said MacDermott, "what of it? That's your —— war for you! Four sons—dead! Four sons and her husband!"

"Yes," said Flint in a low voice, "that's war. And what do we British know about it? What have we suffered? It makes me sick. Downright sick. That poor old thing has given everything she has for France. And, by God, she's proud of it. We ought to be thankful that we've even had the privilege of helping France. I tell you, you fellows— and I don't often feel about anything like I feel about this—if we'd left France to fight this thing out alone, by God, we wouldn't have been fit to exist as a nation. We'd have deserved to have Germany stamp us out, once and for all.

"The French are the finest people on earth, bar none. Could any man hold back after seeing what we've seen? Look what they've suffered! Look at this village—think of the women of France, giving all to their country; carrying on in spite of everything, living under shell-fire, doing their work. And why? Because it's for France. They don't need any persuading, that's sufficient in itself. Could any one mention Germany in the same breath as France? And think what France means to each one of us—now! And once—my God—once we thought of France as—as what?

"Something like what *La Vie Parisienne* expresses. Chorus girls, the cafés, Maxime's. Do you think of England as Picadilly and

Leicester Square or the night clubs, or that mob of shysters in the House of Commons, or those —— swine who want us to make peace with Germany and stop the war—now, when Germany's still unpunished? We've done some pretty average rotten things in the past, but by God, I'm proud to think the British are fighting side by side with the French. And there isn't a sacrifice that we might be asked to make that wouldn't be worth while if it were going to help France."

Flint stopped, out of breath and rather startled by the depth of his own feelings, and found Derrick staring at him intently.

Long after, looking back on that night and all it stood for, Flint remembered the boy standing by the dresser with the light of the candles shining on his face and a strange expression in his eyes, fear or horror or something akin to both.

"Then you think," he began huskily: "you think—" He hesitated and cleared his throat. "I suppose, Flint, a man—every man—ought to be willing to give all for his country—to do anything he's asked to do."

"Yes," said Flint and he wondered what was coming and why the boy seemed all at once troubled and worried. "Yes, of course. It's the least he can do. What's being killed, after all? Nothing—if you're killed for the sake of your country. What's taking a risk, if it's your duty?"

"Nothing," said the boy slowly. "Nothing at all. That's why we're here. A man is justified in doing anything he can to help his own people. Anything. It's his duty, eh? It must be, of course."

He snuffed a guttering candle with a finger and thumb, frowning as though thinking of other things. Then he yawned wearily.

"My hat, but I'm tired tonight. I'm not hungry so I don't think I'll bother about any dinner. I'm going to turn in. Good night, all."

"DO YOU mind if I go out tonight, sir, to have a look at that old crater where they told us they thought the Boches were running out a sap?"

It was the morning after the battalion had reached the trenches once more. The sun was shining in a cold, pale sky, a fresh wind was blowing, and the mud was drying underfoot. Flint, strolling along the fire-trench, piled up high on both sides with sand-bags full of chalk from the mines, had stopped to speak to Derrick in one of the fire-bays.

"What's that?" he said. "So you want to go out on patrol, eh?"

He smiled rather as an elder humoring the request of a small and precocious child.

The boy flushed.

"Why not, sir? I know I can find out what's going on, and it's better for one to go than half a dozen, isn't it?"

"You mustn't go by yourself," said Flint suddenly. "That's settled. I don't want to lose you, kid, and—" he paused for a moment and thought—"I tell you what, you'd better take Corporal Dyer with you."

"I suppose you think I can't look after myself," grumbled the boy.

His face was very red still and offended dignity showed in his expression.

"Not at all," said Flint untruthfully. "Only supposing you get into a scrap or are wounded! You understand!"

"Oh! I understand," said Derrick. "All right, then. I'll take Dyer and find out what's happening."

Flint looked at him curiously. His pleasure was obvious; from his manner one might have judged that he was going home to England rather than that he had been told he might crawl across No Man's Land to the German trenches.

The moon had set and the night was dark and cloudy. The boy went out at midnight. Flint saw him before he left, chuckled at his eagerness, and then, when he had gone, fell to worrying. An unaccountable feeling of anxiety, of fear as to what might perchance happen, weighed him down.

Calling himself names, he tried to shake off his depression, and failed signally.

As the hours went by and Derrick did not return Flint's anxiety grew. Supposing the boy were wounded and had to lie out between the lines for days; supposing he were killed—whenever rifle-shots broke the stillness Flint would find fresh grounds for fear; supposing that they took him prisoner. To Flint this was the worst prospect of all. To be a prisoner in German hands was the most awful fate a man could suffer; hell, unadulterated. Better that a British officer should die before that.

At about three in the morning Derrick returned. Flint, in the company headquarters dug-out, heard footsteps descending the stairs.

"Is that you, kid?" he called.

"Yes, sir," and the boy, his face and hands and clothes plastered with mud, entered.

"Been out the devil of a time, haven't you?" said Flint curtly.

Now that the boy was safe he could afford to show a certain amount of annoyance.

"Yes, I'm afraid so, sir, I've had rather a job."

Flint saw that the boy was troubled.

"What do you mean by 'rather a job'? Not hurt, are you? Where's Dyer?"

"Dyer! I'm afraid he's a prisoner. I've made enquiries and he's not back, so——"

"What!" Flint whistled. "So that's it! What the devil happened?"

"First of all, we crawled through a gap in their wire, sir, and worked our way in the direction of the crater. It took us some time, of course, as the going was bad. Then we found the sap. As a matter of fact we heard them digging, and that guided us. We couldn't make out very much, I'm afraid, it was too dark; but I can show you on a map whereabouts the sap lies. By the way, sir, I think they've got a machine-gun emplacement on the northeast side of the crater.

"They opened fire from there when we began to move back. Their patrols must have spotted us. Some one shouted at us, anyhow, and began shooting from near the sap.

"Things were getting a bit hot so I crept into a shell-hole, thinking that Dyer was with me. But he wasn't. And I've been looking for him ever since. I'm very sorry about it, sir, but I did my best to find him and—I thought I'd better be coming in."

"Good God!" said Flint. "There's nothing to worry about. You couldn't help it! By Jove, though, you must have had a pretty ghastly time of it, Derrick!"

"It's Dyer I'm worrying about. I didn't go off without him—I hope you don't think that, sir."

His eagerness to make it clear that he had tried his utmost to find the corporal struck Flint as something almost pathetic.

"Don't get that into your head!" he said. "—— few of us would have risked going back to look for him as you did. You did your best, what more could you do?"

The boy dropped wearily down on a plank bench and sat with his shoulders bent and his head drooping, the picture of dejection and misery.

"I'm sorry I made such a mess of things," he said. "I was responsible for Dyer—and maybe he's killed or a prisoner and——"

"Listen here, kid," said Flint. "At the end of the second day we were in action at Ypres—October, 1914—I'd seven of my platoon alive. The others had gone west, or were wounded. And I kept thinking if I'd only made them dig in quicker in one place, or withdrawn a little in another, or gone ahead at the double somewhere else, or hadn't let 'em stop just where a Jack Johnson was going to burst—well, they'd still have been with me. You understand! The finest men God ever made: old army, of course. And fight! They were gluttons. They could stand more punishment than any men I've ever met. It was my fault, of course, that they were dead.

"That's what I thought. And I very nearly worried myself sick. And then—well, then, kid, I began to see what war really meant and that to win battles you've got to risk other lives besides your own. You understand. Whatever you tell 'em to do, they'll do it, and they'll get killed—by your orders. It makes war more hellish than ever, eh? And now have a drink, kid, you're shivering. And as for being responsible for Dyer, that's ridiculous. Dyer was responsible for you; that's why I sent him."

IT WAS just after sunrise when the German heavy guns opened fire. Flint listened to the screech of the shells overhead.

"What are they crumping now?" said MacDermott.

From where they stood they could see the smoke of bursting shells rising from the ruined village behind the trenches.

"Giving the village a dose of it, eh!"

"Well I'm glad it's not us, anyway," said Flint.

"The luck can't last, though: we're bound to get it again before long," said MacDermott. "It's too good."

"It does happen like this occasionally," said Flint. "By Jove! They're chucking them in, aren't they?"

That afternoon Flint met an artillery officer at the blanket-covered entrance to an O. P. dug-out.

"Hullo!" said Flint. "How goes it?"

But the gunner who looked tired and worn gave him no answering smile.

"You heard what happened to us, didn't you?" he said.

"No," said Flint. "What?"

"This morning soon after it was light the Huns opened on us. By God, Flint, I don't want to see anything like it again."

"Did they do much damage?"

The artilleryman laughed.

"Put us clean out of action. Three direct hits, right in the gun-pits: three guns smashed to blazes. We've lost three-quarters of the battery, killed and wounded. The dug-outs got hell. The other batteries in the brigade caught it pretty badly, but not like we did. I'm feeling fairly shaky, still."

"Rough luck!" said Flint. "I'm awfully sorry, old chap. I am really." He hesitated. "Old Garnett's all right, of course?"

"I'm afraid not," said the artilleryman.

"What's that?" said Flint quickly. "Not—not killed? Don't say they've killed Garnett!"

"Yes," said the other in a dull whisper. "Blown in half. God Almighty! It was awful."

"What's that?" said a strangled voice. "Garnett killed!"

Flint saw Derrick by his side.

"Garnett killed!" continued the boy. "Why—why I was only with him two days ago. He showed me the battery, everything——"

"The whole battery's gone," said the gunner. "Bridger and Davidson are killed, too; Mulcahy is not expected to live. Hesketh and Grant are wounded. Pretty bad, isn't it?"

"Bad!" said the boy. "Bad! Why, it's——"

He broke off and stared at the artilleryman with an expression of frozen horror, as though the significance of what he had heard was just coming home to him.

"My God! It's awful. Poor old Garnett!"

"It was just a matter of luck, really," said the artilleryman. "They happened to spot us, that's all. So they let us have it!"

"There were few men I liked so well as Garnett," said Flint soberly. "And now he's gone. That's what happens out here—always. Every pal I ever had in the army has been killed. Garnett was going home on leave next week, too. He was telling me how much he wanted to see his wife and kiddies."

As Flint turned away he noticed the lines in the boy's face and he knew that the war with all its cruelty and terror had begun already to leave its mark.

A COMPANY commander who is worth his salt must take notice of all that concerns his company. So Flint made it his business quietly and methodically to study his officers no less than his men, lest in the hour of trial when the machine must do the work of one double or treble, nay ten times, its strength, some small cog wheel should be unequal to its allotted task and the whole mechanism break to pieces under the strain.

And if there were rare and depressing moments, born of the never-ending hardships of a cold and bitter Spring and the uncertainty of the future, when he had wild and foolish doubts concerning Stratton or Mason or even MacDermott, never even when things were at their worst could he have any fears for Derrick.

Derrick, young as he was, was splendid. In everything he undertook he proved his value; his judgment and initiative were far beyond the average subaltern's. Also his spirit was too high to admit the possibility of failure. And Flint knew inwardly that however great the task that might be given him the boy would carry on, undismayed, and in spite of all would be successful.

Yet as the weeks went by, Flint noticed a gradual change creep over him. He was quieter than he had been at first; he had less to say and was more serious. When the others were talking he would sit by himself, listening, taking no part in the conversation but watching each speaker intently as though perplexed or puzzled by what they said.

On rare occasions he would talk wistfully of home and what home meant; Sussex, with the little white villages nestling at the foot of the downs, narrow lanes winding between hedgerows sweet with honeysuckle and wild roses, green meadows and little streams and copses, and an old red-brick house covered with wistaria and set among oaks and copper beeches and elm trees with a big lawn and garden gay with flowers and the blue of the Channel in the distance.

Sometimes Flint would come on him suddenly, seated on the firestep, alone, staring at nothing, lost in thought. When the brigade was out at rest he showed an almost pathetic anxiety not to be forgotten; he must pay his fair share and take his part in everything. And always, in the trenches or out, Flint had the idea that he was worrying; worrying over some deep problem that was past all understanding.

To find an officer's true worth one must go to the men. This was to Flint a self-evident truth.

For who can judge an officer more accurately than the man he commands? He alone can tell whether his officer be just or otherwise; whether he consider his own comfort as of more importance than his men's. An officer may be everything that an officer should be in the mess, yet a dismal failure in the eyes of those under him. And if an officer can not win the confidence and esteem of the soldiers whom he must lead in battle, then he is no real officer and it were better that he had never been born.

Derrick's men, keen judges each one of them, adored him.

This Flint learned for certain one night in March.

He stood in a traverse morosely watching the Verrey lights soar upward and listening to the thunder of the guns in the North.

"So I ses to 'im, I ses, 'I wouldn't do it, sir, if I was you; it ain't your duty, sir, an' it ain't safe!' "

The words came to Flint clearly and he recognized the voice of one of his sergeants.

"An' he laughs. 'Sergeant,' he ses, 'if we was all to think wot was safe an' wot wasn't we wouldn't be here; we'd be at home making munitions an' strikin' for another 'arf-crown a day, instead of sitting about in the wet and gettin' killed.' An' after that I didn't say nothin'. An' off he goes all by himself an' later on I hears 'is rifle barkin' an' back he comes with an old 'elmet as pleased as a puppy wot 'ad just pinched an old shoe from 'is master."

"Did he get any one?" asked another voice.

"Dunno! He's a —— good shot, anyway. I've seen him in daylight in a sniper's post knockin' chips of chalk off their parapet. Anyway he couldn't 'ave got the 'elmet off a live German, could he?"

"He's a decent sort wot I've seen of 'im. Does 'e do that kind o' thing often? Goin' out like that by himself!"

"Often! Every bally night if he can. I tell you, Sam, that kid—he's only eighteen an' he looks sixteen—that kid don't know wot fear is. He's a blasted miracle, more like a ruddy Ghurka than an Englishman. The platoon 'ud go through 'ell for him, if he asked 'em to. He's the best an' most considerate orf'cer I ever come across, not exceptin' young Flint. But Flint's a reg'lar: soldierin's 'is job."

Flint chuckled in the darkness and went on his way. What he had heard satisfied him. If any doubts as to his junior subaltern's abilities as an officer had remained the men's praises would have removed them. What they had said concerning the boy, merely proved that his own views had been correct.

But though Flint might assure himself that no power on earth, neither hardship nor toil, neither danger nor the imminence of death, could ever daunt or diminish Derrick's courage or nerve, yet he had not made due allowance for the effect of incessant rain and snow and fatigue on a body not yet keyed up to the hardships of campaigning.

It was in the last week of May when MacDermott first noticed what was happening.

"Flint," he said, "if you're not very careful you'll find yourself short of a subaltern."

"Good biz!" said Flint. Then he saw by MacDermott's saturnine face that he was serious. "What are you talking about, Mac? You're not getting a transfer, are you?"

"Me? No. But the kid is."

"What the blazes are you driving at now?" said Flint. "The kid's going to do nothing of the kind. To what?"

"Kingdom Come, most probably."

Flint was startled.

"I've not noticed anything wrong," he said. "You mean he's not well, eh?"

"You come and have a good look at him, now," said MacDermott.

SO FLINT slipped on his belt and followed by MacDermott set off in search of Derrick. He found him, as he had half-expected, seated on the fire-step in the front line, gazing moodily up at an aeroplane in the blue sky against which the white puffs of shrapnel showed up like cotton wool.

He lowered his eyes, shivered as though cold, and saw Flint.

"Hullo!" he said. "Want me?"

"No," said Flint, "not exactly, kid. You were right, Mac."

He continued to stare until the color flooded the boy's thin cheeks and he laughed nervously.

"What's up, Flint? Why are you looking at me like that? Anything wrong?"

"No. How are you feeling? Fit?"

"Yes, of course."

"You don't look it, then; does he, Mac?"

"Why didn't you have any breakfast, such as it was? Why don't you sleep when you have the chance?"

"I——"

The boy seemed puzzled.

"What makes you say I don't sleep?"

"Not feverish or anything, are you?" asked Flint, certain that his guess had been right.

"No, Why?"

"You come along with me, kid. I've got something to show you. Mac, you hang on here till I come back."

And he took the boy off, protesting feebly, to the little rabbit-hutch of a shelter which was known officially as the regimental aid post. Here they found the medical officer, short and stout and free of speech, and sundry helpers, inspecting the sick of the battalion.

"Doc," said Flint; for this was a medical officer who, being loved by all, was known simply and vulgarly as "Doc." "Doc, will you have a *dekko* at the kid and tell me exactly what's ailing him?"

"Oh, —— it! I'm all right, honestly I am," said the boy.

"Look at him, Doc. He doesn't eat; he doesn't sleep; he sits on the firestep and shivers; he goes hunting Huns at night, in the wet; he's thinner than he was a month ago——"

"Right!" said the little doctor, and he produced a thermometer and a stethescope.

"Feel all right, kid?" he asked after a while.

"Yes."

"*H'm!* doubt it. Any pain over the heart?"

The boy shook his head miserably.

"I don't understand it," said Flint. "He's quite different from what he used to be."

"Well," said the little doctor, scratching his nose with his stethescope. "Well, there's nothing exactly wrong—organically. His lungs are all right; so's his heart, but he's run down. You're run down, Derrick—understand? If I didn't know you, if I were back in South Kensington trottin' around visitin' patients at half-a-guinea a time I'd say you were—well, worryin' about something. Not in love, are you?"

The boy laughed.

"Lord, no!"

"Good for you. Keep away from 'em, kid. Now look here, you've let yourself go all to pieces. I don't know how. Do you sleep well?"

The doctor was filling in a sick report.

"Usually, I do, but—lately—" the boy shrugged his shoulders as though to show the futility of hiding the truth—"lately, I've not been sleeping at all."

The doctor signed his name, with a flourish.

"Right! Now listen to me, Derrick. I'm serious now. Understand? You'll be having a breakdown if you're not careful. You're on the verge now. The battalion goes out of the line in four days' time. But you must go today. Get right out of this as soon as you can and wait for us."

A look of distress came into the boy's face.

"I can't—I just can't."

"You can and will, my child. I say it, and that's enough."

"But, Doc, you don't expect me to leave my platoon now. It wouldn't be fair. Would it? I can't go out, and leave them here. It's impossible. And what about that raid of ours? I can't be out of that. I've not been over the top with the men yet. And, Doc, I'm all right really, I swear I am."

Even Flint, accustomed as he was to the boy's moods, was perplexed. The little doctor frowned.

"No. You'll do as I tell you. You're needin' a rest, so off you go at once. And do you mean to tell me that your platoon can't manage for four days without you, raid or no raid? Of course they can. They'd far better do without you for a short time than have you taken away for good. Now, that's final. You clear off from the trenches as soon as you can."

And when the little doctor spoke like that argument was futile. The boy drifted off, looking miserably unhappy.

Flint stopped behind.

"What's wrong, Doc?"

"Nerves simply, he's all to pieces. As brave as they make 'em, of course, but he's not strong and if he carries on the way he's doing, all work and no rest, well—we'll be shippin' him home to England. Get him to take things a bit quietly."

"That's easily said, Doc, but you don't know the kid as well as I do. He's breaking his heart now because you've sent him away from the battalion—even if it's only for four days. He was dead keen on going over with us when we raid the Boches."

"*H'm!* Seems to like his work, eh?'

"Crazy about it. And don't talk about nerves! He's the coolest hand I've ever seen in action. I tell you, Doc, that boy ought to have been killed weeks ago. He'll take the most impossible risks just—well, just for the sport of the thing!"

THAT night the German guns opened a heavy bombardment.

Flint, in the company headquarters dug-out, heard the screech and rush of heavy shells.

"Hullo! Hullo! What's that? Bit of a hate on eh!"

He stood up and reached for his steel helmet.

A tremendous crash shook the dug-out; the timbers rocked, as though in an earthquake, earth fell through the narrow spaces between the planks supporting the roof.

Stratton came tumbling down the steep steps of the dug-out.

"My God! That was near, it was, Flint. Did—did you hear it? I thought it was all up with me."

Flint gripped him by the shoulders.

"Steady, old chap! Pretty near, eh?"

"N-near—I dud-dunno, Flint, I thought—thought I was done for. It knocked me down——"

"You stay here, Stratton, in the dug-out." And the noise of the bursting shells was so great he had to shout. "I'm going up to see what's happening."

"Good God! Flint—Flint, you're never going out in this! They're dropping heavy stuff all over the place."

"All the more reason for my going. I've got to see after those poor devils of mine."

Slowly he climbed out into the trench, trying to shut out of his consciousness all thought of peril and succeeding only passing well. Most men would have called him brave, even in an army where cold-blooded bravery was the rule—Flint realized that with no false modesty—but never yet had he overcome his hatred of shell-fire with all its infinite possibilities. Before each attack or each spell of duty in the line, he felt a greater and ever growing need of forcing himself to show his unconcern. For, according to Flint's code, an officer must never show that he either feared or even respected shell-fire; outwardly at least he must appear oblivious of danger and devoid of fear.

So now, when his whole being craved for safety, for the shelter of a deep dug-out, he deliberately climbed out into the open, cursing himself for so doing. For why should he, merely because he wore three stars on his cuff, lurk in safety while others, common soldiers in rank but better men than himself, suffered the agonies of hell? If they could die, so too could he: if death in action were to be his fate no power on earth could save him from his doom.

A slight rain was falling; the night was acrid with the fumes of high explosives; the glare of bursting shells lit up the blackness, their crashing and screeching stunned the senses to a numbed and helpless terror.

Flint, staggering drunkenly, ran up a short stretch of communication trench to the chaos and horror of the front line.

The screech of an approaching shell made him throw himself headlong at the bottom of the trench, his hands clasped around his head. There was a deafening roar as of the heavens splitting, a blinding flash of light, the very ground heaved upward with the explosion, and Flint lay on his face, half-buried by a fall of sandbags and stunned by the concussion. For a moment he could not move, then slowly, making an effort he forced himself to rise.

Near at hand a ghastly voice was shrieking piteously.

"Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, kill me, for God's sake!"

Flint shuddered and reeled on.

"Where are you?"

But the voice was lost amid the incessant roar of shells rushing down the steep arc on to the tortured soil.

Flint stumbled on from one broken bay to another, ducking his head as though to shield himself from the storm of steel, and seeing in the sudden geysers of flame flung upward dark figures of men cowering in the muddy trench or clambering into shell holes. Some were silent, some swore foully, incessantly, terribly, cursing the God that had brought them to this hell, one was sobbing bitterly, another standing among the dead in a part of the trench where a shell had landed uttered wild and devilish laughs as though fear had robbed him of his soul, and he, as Flint passed, clutched him by the arm.

"Ho! You bloody orf'cer—why ain't you in yer dug-out? All dead, every one of 'em—all dead, an' you an' me alive."

And to each man he saw Flint, stumbling along through great gusts of flame, shouted words of encouragement, seeking forgetfulness of self and what might come at any instant in the presence of those less able to bear the strain.

"Get back into the supports, d'you hear me? You—there!"

"Me legs are broken—leave me be."

"Are you wounded or not? You!" This to a man face downward in a shell-hole, moaning. "You're not wounded? Then, —— and blast it, get up! Come on, get up! Go back into the support line at once! It's your only hope. And you—get on back, as I tell you. You can't stop here, and maybe they're coming over. Oh, for ——'s sake, get a move on!"

Rounding what remained of a traverse, Flint saw by the light of a star-shell Mason crouching motionless in the midst of what had once been men lying as the shell had scattered them.

"Mason, old chap, get back into the supports. There's no chance of holding the front line."

Mason did not speak. He grasped his shoulder but Mason toppled over backward and, Flint stooping down, found that he too was dead.

In the blackness following on the glare Flint, alone with the slain, groped his way through the drifting smoke of the bombardment to where a sergeant buried to the neck in débris was crying feebly for help.

"Take me out of this, some one, for the love of God! Oh, God! Don't leave me——"

"All right, Sergeant." Flint reached his side and digging with bare hands began to loosen the chalk piled up around him. "I'll get you out. Hang on!"

He worked with frantic haste, paying no heed to the shells, intent only on the rescue of one of his men, dragging at the lumps of chalk and clay until his nails were torn and bleeding.

"I must get something to dig with," he said hoarsely. "I won't be long, Sergeant."

"Don't leave me, sir. I can't stand it much longer."

Aching in each limb, dizzy with fatigue, Flint turned and searched the shell-holes until he found a dead man with an entrenching tool blade and handle in his equipment. The crash of heavy shrapnel bursting overhead threw him to his knees. When he staggered back to where he had been working, the sergeant was dead, his face streaming with blood from a huge scalp wound.

Flint threw the entrenching tool aside and laughed bitterly.

"Oh, what's the good!"

The shelling ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and the pale pink sky of dawn found tired, sleepy, broken men building anew the battered fire-trench.

Flint saw MacDermott, red-eyed and pale and covered from head to foot with mud, coming toward him.

"Hullo, Mac," he said wearily. "It's been the —— of a night, eh? I'm about done in."

"Flint," said MacDermott, "have you seen little Stratton anywhere?"

"Me! No. I left him in the dug-out soon after they started *strafing* us. He's there, isn't he? He'd had a bit of a shock or something—a shell burst near him and knocked him a bit silly. Why, what's up?"

MacDermott's face was very grave.

"Flint, old man, the whole dug-out's blown to blazes. A shell must have landed right on top of it."

"Oh, my God! And poor little Stratton. —— it!" said Flint fiercely. "I wish to God that we'd never—" He broke off with a grim laugh. "Oh! Well, what's the use of it? The poor little man's dead, and Mason's dead—I wonder if they've taken him away yet. I'm glad the kid wasn't in it. It's been a bad night, Mac: as bad as any we've had. By God! We'll take it out of the Huns for this, though; they'll pay for what they've done, Mac, or I'm a Dutchman."

EARLY in the afternoon Derrick rejoined the battalion.

Flint met him plodding up a communication trench, now no more than a wide ditch with crumbling sides.

"Why the —— are you here?" he demanded. "Where do you think you're going, Derrick?"

"Front line," said the boy.

He spoke gruffly, without raising his eyes. And, although in the past twelve hours he had seen fear and horror and suffering in every degree marked in the faces of his men, Flint was shocked by the boy's looks. His color had left him, his eyes were sunken, there were hollows in his cheeks, he looked worn-out and ill.

"Front line?" said Flint. "You'll do nothing of the kind. We've no front line—only shell-holes now—and we won't have till we've had a chance to build it up properly. I'm not going to have you risking your life when there's no need for it. 'Bout turn, kid, and we'll get along to headquarters; it's just 'round the corner. We're using another dug-out now, the old one's crumped pretty badly. What made you come back?"

The boy who had turned glanced over his shoulder.

"I heard—they told me you'd had—had rather a rotten time last night."

"Rather a rotten time! My giddy aunt! Lord, kid, we got it in the neck, proper! We had thirty-five killed and sixty wounded out of the company alone."

"My God!" said the boy in a broken voice, "and I was out of it, after all."

"Out of it! Yes: and I'm —— glad you were." They were descending the steps into the dug-out. "I couldn't afford to lose any more of my subalterns, kid."

"What's that, Flint? Flint, none of the others were knocked out, were they? Don't tell me that, for God's sake!"

"Mason and Stratton."

"Killed," said the boy hoarsely.

" 'Fraid so!"

Derrick swayed and Flint caught him.

"Steady now, old chap, hold up!"

The boy dropped on to a wooden box and sat for a while with his head buried in his hands.

"I shouldn't have gone. I shouldn't have gone. Oh, my God, why didn't I stay?"

"Don't be a silly idiot, kid! You couldn't have done any good if you'd been here."

"Flint," said the boy, "if I'd known—if I'd known——"

"It wouldn't have made any difference, son, if you had."

"And the men?"

"You've never seen a heavy bombardment, have you, kid? We've been lucky lately. But last night made up for it. From what you read in the papers, you'd think our fellows didn't mind shell-fire." He laughed. "They were broken helplessly, and what else could you expect? But God help 'em when our chaps get in among 'em with the bayonets next time, that's all."

"They're wonderful, of course," said the boy. "Wonderful." He sighed. "My God! This war is awful. Once—before I came out I thought the army was—I hope you don't think me a —— fool, Flint—the one career a man could have. But it's hellish—simply hellish—and I wish to God I'd never——"

He broke off suddenly and sat staring across at Flint with vacant, unseeing eyes.

Flint frowned.

"You're not fit, kid, that's what's the matter. Why the devil did you come back so soon?"

"I can't keep away, Flint. I simply can't. You don't know how I felt when I heard what you chaps had to go through last night. There was I skulking behind the line while the men I was supposed to be commanding were being butchered. I just couldn't bear to think of the battalion being in action without me, that's why."

"That's all very well, but—you're not fit, old son, and you've got to go back till the brigade comes out of the line."

"But, Flint," the boy looked frightened, "Flint, you forget—tonight we're going over the top—why, I simply must be here. You've not altered the arrangements, have you, after last night?"

Flint shook his head.

"N-no; we've not. We're raiding 'em tonight just to prove that their old bombardments don't worry us."

Derrick was smiling in a puzzled fashion.

"But, Flint, if we're going to raid 'em, don't you see that I've simply got to go. I can't leave the trenches now—how can I?"

"I'm afraid you must, kid," said Flint kindly. "You're not fit and that's all about it. You must have a rest. I'm sorry, but we can't afford to take you. It's not fair on yourself."

He stopped, startled by the look of hopeless despair that had settled on the boy's face.

"What's up, kid? You're a bundle of nerves these days. That night work has been too much of a strain on you—I thought it would be. You've got to get out of the trenches before you're carried out on a stretcher."

"My God, Flint! You don't understand."

"I understand this, kid, that you're not fit: you're not strong enough for the work we've got to do tonight. Also I'm not going to lose another subaltern for nothing."

There were tears in the boy's eyes. Flint stared at him pityingly. He was ill, of course, and not himself, otherwise he would have long since given in to what was inevitable. By this time he must know all arguments were futile.

"You don't know what it means to me, Flint. You've stopped me, just when I wanted to do some good. I was hoping—" He made a funny almost foreign-looking little gesture with his hands. "I'm making a fool of myself, aren't I? And I'm half blubbing, too. Sorry I'm such a fool! But I'd set my heart on being with the crowd tonight when they went into the German trenches. And after last night it doesn't seem fair, somehow, to be out of it. I wanted to feel I was really part of the battalion for once and—and that I was sharing the same risks as the others."

Flint felt as though he were out of his depth. The kid was crazy: he must be; no man in the battalion had run more risks than he had. What was worrying him?

"You've done more all along than any one else, Derrick."

The boy shook his head and looked at Flint with a curious weariness in his eyes.

"No, Flint, I've not. I've done nothing. You don't understand—how could you? If you'd let me go over with the company tonight I'd prove everything I say now. I'm not like you, Flint, I can't hide my feelings. I thought I could, but I can't. I feel as if this war was driving me mad—mad with—with anger—or hate. I can't explain, but I hate the people we're fighting like I hate vermin—the rats or lice that we get in the trenches." He shuddered.

"I hate their methods, their deceit, their cruelty, their army, their Kaiser, their own particular brand of God—they're unclean, Flint, like animals—they're not human. I know—how can any one help knowing. They want to make the whole world like themselves. I hate them more than I ever thought I could hate. I want to kill some of them, Flint, or—or be killed myself. Let me go, for Heaven's sake!"

Flint listened to the boy's outburst in silence.

At nineteen one can not have what is called a past, of that he was certain; but none the less the boy's manner, his agitation, his sudden loss of control puzzled him. He was nervous and even frightened—desperately frightened: yet of what? Not of the Germans, certainly. There was something wrong somewhere; but the case was one that no doctor, however learned in the ills of the flesh, could diagnose or prescribe for.

"Well," said the boy after a while; "what are you going to do?"

"You'll have other opportunities of killing Huns, Derrick. There's no need to worry about that. You're not yourself and you've got to rest. That's final. Stay in the dug-out and go out of the trenches tomorrow morning. Only—no playing the fool! Understand! You'll give me your word of honor not to disobey orders and follow us over, won't you? You must stay at the 'phone and don't leave it."

"All right," said the boy slowly. "I'll do what you say. It's hard, of course, but everything out here is hard, isn't it? Damnably hard."

THE raid was a success: even Flint had no criticism to offer. As it had been planned, days before the bombardment, so it was carried through, without a hitch.

The men of Flint's company had their allotted part, on the right flank, and Flint knew by the grim look on their faces, the stern and sullen manner in which they spoke, that they would exact a dreadful payment for their sufferings of the night before. Bitter as he was, he could find it in his heart to pity those Germans who were doomed to meet them in battle that night. It was a quarter to two when the artillery and trench-mortar barrage lifted and Flint and his men went forward into No Man's Land. They advanced slowly held back by shell-craters and broken wire; above their heads screamed the shells, in front of them crept the line of blinding flashes which marked the barrage.

The *rat-tat-tat-tat-tat* of an enemy's machine gun came from the right but with few casualties the raiders crossed the open and burst into the German front-line trench.

By the light of the star-shells that shot up into the darkness Flint saw the fire-bay into which he had jumped crowded with men, British and German, jammed together and fighting with rifle and bayonet and fist and bomb.

"Clear 'em out, boys!" he shouted. "Into 'em."

A big German struck at him savagely with his butt over the back of a man who was striving to hold another down at the bottom of the trench. Flint dodged but the rifle grazed his left shoulder and he was hurled backward. The German threw himself forward and pinned him against the counterscarp of the trench, snarling angrily the while and shouting in German. Only half-realizing what he did, sick with the pain in his shoulder, Flint wrenched his right hand free and pulled the trigger of his revolver. The German with a grunt collapsed on top of the two men who had been struggling in the mud.

"Take 'em off, quick," shouted a gruff voice. "'Urry! I've croaked this —— blighter but I'm 'arf dead meself."

After it was all over certain pictures were stamped vividly in Flint's mind, seen in the flashes of light in the midst of the blackness: a sergeant in his company, a pale, thin-faced North-countryman, with blazing eyes, a street preacher from Rochdale, wild with berserk rage, bareheaded, fighting his way through the press, armed like some Crusader with a butcher's cleaver: a big, fine-looking German, a man of substance perhaps in his own village, blood pouring down his chin, a horrible fear written on his countenance, screaming out guttural prayers —prayers they must have been—as with all hope of escape gone he awaited the bayonet: another—a man with the fierce eyes of a ferret—Flint remembered the eyes—fighting viciously in a narrow part of the trench until there came to him, also, the knowledge of death: a dug-out entrance, black as the pit, and crazy men in khaki, jostling each other and shouting out demands that the occupants should surrender, then the sudden change of tone: "Give it 'em, boys—the beggars won't come up—we can't wait 'ere all night—come on, now—where's them Stokes bombs?" followed by the terrific explosions and the shrieks of agony, and the dense clouds of smoke: and lastly, and this happened as the rocket to recall the raiders soared upward and Flint blew his whistle, the German officer, scornful and haughty and very angry, who was the prisoner of a small, blaspheming private.

"Look wot I've got," shouted the private, "a blurry orficer. Get on, you—or I'll run yer through. I ain't afraid of the likes o' you. 'Op it!"

And he drove him before him with wild oaths.

It was the prisoner who became Flint's chief concern once he had got his men, full of excitement and the triumph of success, back across No Man's Land now under the enemy's shell-fire, into the shelter of their own lines.

"Sergeant-Major," he said, "call the roll of the company, find out the casualties and send any men of A and C back to their own companies. And tell Mr. MacDermott to take charge for a few minutes. I've got to 'phone battalion headquarters at once."

He turned to the small private who with another was guarding the prisoner—

"Bring that officer along now!"

Then he made his way down the trench to the dug-out.

Derrick was waiting for him.

"Hullo, Flint! I heard you were back. Everything all right?"

"Rather! I'm in the devil of a hurry, though, and I've brought a prisoner."

The boy stood in the middle of the floor of the small dug-out, lit by candles and full of dark shadows. He was smiling a little as though with Flint's return all anxiety had gone. An orderly sat on a box in the corner. Flint walked over to the telephone and the two privates, their khaki and equipment covered with mud, brought in their prisoner.

Flint, lifting the receiver from off the stand, saw that the boy's face showed strangely gray and worn against the blackness, and the thought came to him that he had done wrong in not sending him off to hospital. He wasn't fit, of course. He needed a thorough rest before he would be any good for the trenches again.

"Give the prisoner a seat, kid, will you, and a smoke?"

"I don't think you'll get through, sir," said the orderly. "We've been trying for ten minutes. The wires are cut."

"Curse!" said Flint. "That's a —— nuisance." He hung up the receiver. "Well, I've got to let headquarters know what's happened so far as D Company is concerned." He nodded to the two privates. "All right, you two, you'd better cut along now. Wait in the trench till you're wanted. Tell Smith, my batman, to give you a drink. Say I sent you."

The two privates, grinning their thanks, went out.

Flint turned to the prisoner.

"Do you speak English?" he asked.

THE German, cold scorn in his eyes, shrugged his shoulders and said nothing.

Flint grunted.

"*H'm!* That's rather awkward. I'd made sure every German spoke English." He looked at Derrick. "You don't speak German, do you, kid?"

The boy moistened his lips.

"You know I don't. I wish I did."

And though he spoke to Flint he kept his eyes fixed on the tall prisoner with a kind of sick horror in his eyes.

"MacDermott does, anyhow," said Flint. "But he's the only officer in the battalion who can. He'll have to go down to headquarters with the prisoner."

He scribbled a few lines in his note-book and glanced at his watch.

"A quarter past two exactly." He turned to the orderly. "Marshall," he said, "take this back to battalion headquarters as quick as you can. It's important, of course."

The orderly picked up his shrapnel helmet and respirator, saluted, and disappeared up the stairs.

"Well," said Flint, "that's done. By Jove, I'm tired. It's been a great night, kid. The men were splendid: simply glorious."

"I wish I'd been with you," said the boy wistfully.

"I think I'll go back and see the sergeant-major. I'm not quite sure yet what losses the company had. And I'll fetch Mac back with me. You'll stay here, Derrick, and keep an eye on our friend. I won't be long."

Flint went up into the open air. The two privates were waiting.

"Did you get your drink?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said the men, "thank you, sir."

The Germans had begun to shell heavily but without accuracy, scattering high explosive and shrapnel haphazard over the trenches, as though bent on exacting punishment somehow but without knowing exactly from whom.

Flint walked on until he came upon MacDermott talking to the sergeant-major near a machine gun emplacement.

"Well," he said, "what's the result?"

"I've got the names down on the list, sir," said the sergeant-major. "There's only five not accounted for. Three men killed and seven wounded. Prisoners taken by D Company eleven: that includes the officer, sir."

"Good business!" said Flint. "That's great. Mac, I want you to go down to battalion headquarters with the prisoner. You're the only officer in the battalion that speaks German and I think we must find out one or two things before we hand him over to the tender mercies of the intelligence people."

"Who's with him?" said MacDermott.

"No one, except the kid. When I left they were glaring at each other from opposite sides of the dug-out like a couple of wild-cats. As neither of them can understand a word the other says I suppose they'll keep on doing it. Hallo!"

A shell burst with a roar at the back of the trench down which they were walking.

"By Jove! That's nearer, Mac."

"*H'm.* The Huns are angry."

"Don't wonder," said Flint. "We gave 'em something to be angry for."

The noise of the guns made talking difficult, and they hurried on in silence down the muddy trench until they reached the entrance to the dug-out where the two privates still waited crouching against the sand-bags.

"Everything all right?" said Flint.

"Yes, sir."

"Any one else in the dug-out beside Mr. Derrick and the prisoner. No other officer?"

"No, sir."

"Right! Well, you'd better wait where you are. We won't be a minute. Go on, Mac. You first."

MacDermott stepped through the doorway and on to the stairs that led down to the dug-out. Flint followed, looking back over his shoulder and listening to the fierce cracking of shrapnel bursting near at hand.

And then MacDermott's fingers gripped his wrist with a warning pressure.

From the dug-out there came the sound of a low, guttural voice talking angrily.

For a moment, Flint, his thoughts back in the trench where the shells were dropping, could attach neither importance nor significance to what was happening.

Some one—the prisoner—was speaking. Why not? Why shouldn't he speak? Why shouldn't he even speak in German? He wondered impatiently why MacDermott had stopped: what he was listening for?

And then it flashed into his mind that there were two people only in the dug-out—Derrick and the German officer—and that neither could speak the other's language. The German officer must be speaking to himself, then.

All at once a strange premonition of disaster stole over him.

"What is it?" he said. "Why are you stopping, Mac?"

MacDermott relaxed his grip on his wrist and moved on, quickly and softly, down the steps into the lighted dug-out.

The boy, white to the lips, faced the tall German, who glared at him scornfully.

"What's the matter?" said Flint. "Anything wrong?"

"I don't know." The boy hesitated. "He began to talk to himself in German—I didn't understand him."

At that the German threw back his head and gave a short laugh. Then he spoke a few, sharp words in German.

"God Almighty!" said MacDermott harshly.

"What is it?" said Flint. "What the devil's happening?"

He glanced from one to the other: MacDermott, his face like stone, grim and hard; the German, smiling contemptuously, his eyes half-closed, his teeth showing in a sneer under his fair upturned mustache; and Derrick, looking like death itself, so strange and ghastly was his expression.

For a brief space, while one might have counted ten, no one spoke.

The German laughed once more and bowed in an ironic manner, first to Flint, then to MacDermott, and lastly to Derrick. Then he spoke in English.

"I am afraidt, chentlemen, dot I have been deceiving you. I can speak English well, but not so well as our young friendt here can speak Cherman, of course."

"What do you mean?" said Flint. "You can't speak German, Derrick, can you?"

"You do not believe me, hey?" said the German. "All right! Den why does he not say somesing—dot traitor to Chermany? He can not. He knows dot der game is finished."

"What the blazes are you driving at?" said Flint roughly. "A traitor to Germany! Are you crazy?"

"Crazy!" said the German bitterly. "*Mein Gott!* No. I say it again. A traitor to Chermany! He knows. See him now!"

The thing was monstrous. So monstrous, indeed, so outrageous and absurd, that it meant nothing.

Flint felt that he was growing angry. Also he was frightened. Something was happening which he could not understand: something that was perfectly clear to the other three.

He turned swiftly to the boy.

"Derrick, what is it? Why don't you speak? Why don't you put an end to this —— foolishness? This swine here is calling you a traitor! And a traitor to Germany, too! Why? Because you're fighting for your own country against his?"

There was no reply. The boy merely stared in the same dazed way at the big German. So, thought Flint, might a cornered hare have watched the huntsman.

"His country," said the prisoner in a quiet voice. "Vot is dot? Dot officer of yours is a Cherman; I am ashamed to say it. I am in your hands, chentlemen; if you kill me, it is der fortune of war. But it is my duty, der duty of a Cherman officer to make sure dot der traitor is punished."

"Stop that!" said Flint angrily. The threat in the German's tone warned him of danger. "Put your hands up this instant, you fool, or I'll shoot!"

BUT before Flint could move, even while he was still speaking, the German sprang, tigerlike, so swift and terrible was his onslaught, and gripping the boy's throat in his two hands sent him headlong against the boarded wall of the dug-out.

Flint jerked his revolver from its holster and, with a feeling of savage satisfaction, fired. The German relaxed his grip and fell with a clatter to the floor. Derrick shoved him away and staggered to his feet, choking. MacDermott dropped to his knees and turning the wounded man over raised his head. A dark red patch stained the front of his field-gray tunic. His florid face had lost its color, and his eyes were closed. Flint waited in silence without the slightest feeling of compassion.

The German had deserved to die. He had told black lies about a British officer, about an officer in the best battalion in the British army. Death was almost too good a punishment for such carrion. Derrick, a German—the very idea was preposterous. A lie? Of course it was a lie. Reason fought and triumphed over suspicion in Flint's consciousness.

"He's gone," said MacDermott.

"Not yet," said the German; "not yet," and he made an effort to raise himself.

MacDermott slipped his arm under his shoulders and eased him up.

"He may escape me, but—dere are dose he will not escape. Chermany will neffer forgive! He has told you lies—and—" the prisoner's eyes were glazed and dull, his breath came in deep sobs— "and he has told lies to us. He will die—a traitor—but I—die—for Chermany."

His head sank forward on to his chest.

"He's dead, I think," said MacDermott, and he lowered him gently to the ground.

For a time no one spoke. The gunfire sounded like distant surf beating on the shore. MacDermott frowning a little was rubbing the blood from off his hands. Flint watched him curiously.

"Well?" said the boy in a husky tone. "Well?"

"Did he hurt you?" asked Flint.

"No," said the boy. "Oh, no!"

"I wonder if they heard the revolver?" said Flint. "I don't think so. There's such a dickens of a row going on, they'd hardly notice it." He stopped short, afraid of what he must say next: then with an effort he went on quickly. "A —— lie, kid, eh? What he said about you!"

The boy raised his hands and let them fall helplessly to his sides.

"No," he said hoarsely. "No, it's true, I'm not English, Flint. He was right. I'm a traitor to Germany—because I'm a German."

An icy coldness gripped Flint's heart. As at a distance far away, he heard a stern voice, his own voice, speaking.

"You're what?"

"I'm German."

"You're German!" He spoke slowly as though to let the significance of what the boy had said sink into his mind. "You're German? Oh!" He paused, pondering. "But—you're fighting for us, Derrick. That's why you're a traitor to Germany. I see now. That's what he meant, isn't it?"

And at that the boy gave a low, mirthless laugh.

"Flint, don't you understand even now? MacDermott does: he heard. Don't you understand that I was—was helping them?"

"Helping them!" said Flint dully. "Helping the Germans!"

And then all at once Flint understood. He felt that he was being stifled, that he must get out into the fresh air or he would choke. His throat seemed to have contracted so that it was difficult to swallow, his heart hammered against his ribs, there was a black mist before his eyes so that he could scarcely see and a singing in his ears.

"Oh, my God!" he whispered. "Oh, my God! So it's true, after all!"

"Yes," said the boy, "it's true."

"And I believed in you—I trusted you—I'd rather have had you with me in a tight place than almost any other man I've ever met—and you're a German!"

The very thought hurt him. It seemed, even now, impossible. The kid, a German! An enemy!

"My God! it's a —— lie. It must be!"

Again and again he came back to that: the impossibility of an officer in his battalion being an enemy.

"It's the truth, Flint," said the boy wearily. "I'm a German—a German spy. I was, at least: I'm not now. Ask MacDermott; he heard him talking to me. But I'll tell you everything from the beginning. I must: I'm not quite such a cur as you think me, Flint. Maybe, when I've explained, you'll understand. When I remember what you've done for me, and how——"

Flint stopped him.

"All right, Derrick. Never mind that now. How did it happen?"

"It began years ago before the war was thought of—thought of, by you, at least. They knew, of course, and they had me trained for this—just for this end. I came over to England when I was quite small and lived with my uncle in London. He wasn't an uncle, really, but he passed as one, and to all intents and purposes I was the same as any other boy at school."

He stopped suddenly.

"What's the good?" he asked. "It hurts—like—like hell."

"Go on," said Flint. "Finish it now you've started."

And all the while there raced through his mind again and again, keeping time to the pounding of his heart, the awful truth: Derrick, a spy! Derrick, a spy! Derrick, a spy!

"Flint, you remember what you told us that night—the night the old Frenchwoman heard her last son was killed at Verdun—that a man must be ready to give all to his country—to do what he's told to do without questioning: that was what I was doing. It was for Germany. And, Flint, it wasn't easy. Sometimes even when I was at school I funked it—it seemed so hopeless—and then I'd remember it was for Germany, the—the Fatherland, and that seemed to smooth over all difficulties.

"I wasn't quite old enough for Woolwich or Sandhurst before war broke out but I went to Sandhurst afterward. There was no difficulty about that. They were clever, Flint—you don't realize how clever! Nobody had any suspicions about me. Why should they? You didn't, did you? They had money, influence, friends, everything to help them succeed. And then I came out here. I don't think they could have known which battalion and brigade I was coming to—I didn't know myself till I left the base—but they knew as soon as I got here. Why? I left a message at the gap in their wire the first night I went out with you!

"My work was easy. All I had to do was to let them know what was going to happen. I might have been killed by German shells or bullets, of course, but what of that? I was a soldier, and it was my duty to risk my life for my country. They'd taught me that early. Flint, don't you see that I was doing as much for Germany as you—as you were for England? Don't you see that it was my duty to help Germany in every way I could?

"I USED to go out on patrol whenever I had the chance. I went over to their lines, of course. They'd give me helmets, rifles, anything I wanted, for souvenirs so that you might think I'd taken them myself from men I'd killed.

"And you remember the night I went out with Dyer, Flint, don't you? I had to get rid of him. He was in my way. He's not dead. You might let his wife know. I had him taken prisoner and he's safe in Germany. They won't let him write though—not yet.

"You remember, too, after I came that the battalion had a quiet time in the line. You said I'd brought luck. God forgive me! It was quiet because they knew I was here. They kept their guns off our sector because of me. And then——"

His face was very pale, but his eyes, full of trouble and pain as they were, met Flint's steadily, his voice, though so low that at times it sank almost to a whisper, was firm.

"There was Garnett's battery, too, Flint, I'll have the deaths of those men on my conscience till my dying day—" He stopped short with a hard laugh. "My dying day—my God—that doesn't say much—does it?"

Flint shivered. Horror was piling upon horror.

"I gave away the battery positions—showed 'em on the map where each gun-pit was—and they knocked out the whole battery the next day. That was hell. Garnett was killed. And I'd done it. I'd killed him as surely as though I'd put a bullet through him. I was doing what I'd been trained to do, what I knew was my duty, yet I felt sick. I went through hell in those days, Flint. This—" again he gave a hard little laugh—"this is nothing—it's come as—as a relief almost after what's happened."

"Oh, my God!" The cry came from Flint's heart. "Derrick, man, think what you're saying! Do you know what you've just told me? Do you understand that you've said that Garnett and his men were killed through you?"

"Yes," said the boy. "Through me Garnett was killed. You remember, Flint, saying I looked ill? I was. I've never felt—I didn't believe any one could feel—like I felt. There have been nights, Flint, when I lay awake till dawn—just wondering what would happen to me and praying to God that I'd be killed before you found out. I was always frightened of that: always. Well, it doesn't matter now. You know, and it's finished.

"But what I'm getting at is this, Flint.

I learned after I'd been out here a few weeks that I was no longer a German. I looked an Englishman, I spoke like one—that's why I'm here, of course—and I felt like one. I wasn't German any more. It's true, Flint, as true as Gospel. I'd lived in England too long. England was home, the only home I knew: English people and the English country; Sussex and Surrey and Devon and Somerset: English fields and woods and streams and orchards. They were home to me. And when I came out here I had to do my best to go back on everything that meant anything at all.

"All my sympathies were with the British, and I hated Germany and what Germany stood for. They'd sent me to England to become as English as I could. I'd done so; but I'd gone further than they meant me to. What else could I do but hate myself? I'd seen the battalion in the trenches, I'd got to know the men, to like them, to know what they were, how splendid and fine and gentle, I knew what they suffered, what they'd done out here, and I knew—and this was as bad as anything, Flint—I knew that some of those men under my command, in my platoon, would be killed because of what I was doing. Do you wonder that I was nearly mad at the thought? Are you surprised now that I looked sick?

"Flint, I knew that bombardment last night was coming. They told me and I'd been ordered to get away from the trenches. I told them once I could work it, whenever I wished—I could too—and then I determined I wouldn't. If the men, my men, were to go through hell, I'd stay with them. I'd stick it the same as they did. But you wouldn't let me: you sent me away. I couldn't tell you, could I? You mayn't believe all this, Flint, but it's the truth, every word of it. I'd rather have been with the company in the bombardment than where I was.

"And, Flint, I knew that this raid was coming off: I had known it, as soon as you did. But I never told them. They had asked me if we were going to come over in this sector: I said that we weren't. That was a lie, of course. I wouldn't tell them. I kept putting it off. It didn't seem fair, somehow: and when I heard the guns last night and knew that my men were being killed, I swore that I'd be in the raid myself.

"I wanted to kill, to show I was English, body and soul, before being killed. I wanted to show I could fight as well as the rest of you, and you stopped me again. Flint, that broke my heart. If I'd died out there fighting the Germans, as I hoped to die, you'd never have known—and now, what am I? A German, a German spy, a traitor to Britain, a traitor to Germany, and I've no country."

He stopped talking and Flint, rousing himself from the stupor into which he had fallen, looked at him and saw in his face the hopelessness of despair and the knowledge of what he really was, an outcast, an object of scorn in the eyes of all right-thinking men.

And all at once Flint realized as never before, how young the boy really was, how forlorn and lonesome and yet how brave: a feeling of horror surged over him as he thought of what must have been the ordeal through which he had passed: and he knew also that there was no hope. Through Derrick Garnett had been killed. Never since the far-off days of Marlborough when the regiment first carried its colors into battle, nor through the years of fighting that followed, in Germany, in North America, in the West Indies, in Egypt, in Spain and Portugal, in France and Belgium, in India and in Russia, not even in time of disaster or defeat, had the loyalty and honor of one of its officers been questioned.

A spy! A German spy! Flint whispered it to himself and shivered. One of their officers was a spy! And Garnett was dead!

MacDERMOTT was the first to break the silence. "He's right, Flint. I heard that—" he nodded toward the dead German lying on his back on the floor—"call him a traitor. He said that he'd broken his word, gone back on the fatherland—I dunno—he said a lot of things." He turned to the boy. "You told him that you wouldn't go on with what you were doing, wasn't that it?"

"Yes," said the boy wearily. "He asked me if I'd known of the raid. I told the truth for once. I said I had, and that I hadn't given them any warning because I'd never warn them again—of anything. I was not fighting for them any more."

Flint uttered a groan of agony.

"My God! Mac! It seems impossible—

impossible. One of our officers! And all the time I thought he was fighting for us, he was fighting for Germany, doing his best to get us beaten."

"Well," said the boy roughly, "what are you going to do with me?" He waited a moment for a reply, and then continued. "What is it to be? Will you shoot me? Make me a prisoner? Tell the colonel? Have me tried by court-martial?"

The boy was standing with his back to the table: he held himself upright, his head tilted slightly back, his shoulders squared; his hair had been rumpled in the scuffle with the German, he had a bruise on his cheek bone, his collar was torn open, showing his throat. MacDermott leaned against the wall on the opposite side of the dug-out, his hands in his pockets, his face half-hidden by the shadow cast by the steel helmet he still wore, only his mouth showed grim and stern.

Between them on the rough chalk floor lay the German officer, his wide-open eyes staring up at the ceiling, his arms bent and his fists clenched, his gray uniform stained with mud and blood. From a dark corner of the dug-out a huge gray rat, encouraged by the deep silence, came out, but as Flint spoke, turned and scampered back to its lair.

"Tell the colonel!" said Flint slowly. "Have you tried by court-martial! And have every one in the division know that you—in our battalion—that you——"

He could not force himself to finish.

The boy smiled.

"That I was a German spy, sent here by Germany, paid by Germany. Why not?"

"I hate saying it," said Flint grimly, "but I wish to God, kid, you'd been killed before you told us! You were right in wanting that, it would have been better that way. We'd never have known—never. As it is, they'll all know: every one. It's bound to come out now: everything."

"Why is it?" said the boy.

"How can we stop it?" said Flint sternly. "Derrick, there's one thing I can not do. It's out of the question. I know what war is. Who better? Each one of us must do as he's told. I don't blame you. How can I? You did what they ordered you to do—for your country. You knew the consequences of failure. Can I let anything stand in the way of doing what I know is my duty? Can I——"

Derrick interrupted him.

"I'm not asking for mercy, Flint. That would be no use to me, now. I've gone too far. No one wants me, I'm finished, but, Flint, I'd like as few people as possible to know what I really was. You don't want others to find out, either, do you?"

"I don't," said Flint, "but know they must sooner or later."

"Mayn't there be—an—an accident, Flint? Let me go out my own way. No one will know, then, and—if I thought that the men had no suspicion of what I'd been——"

Flint looked up to find Derrick's eyes fixed on him, and in them he read an appeal for pity that his lips could never have put into words.

"That's the only possible way out, Flint," said MacDermott suddenly. "No one save us three—" he looked at the dead man once more—"need ever know."

"Are you strong enough, Derrick?" said Flint.

The boy's lips quivered, then he drew himself up proudly.

"Yes. I am. It's the one chance I've got. It's that or—or every one knowing."

"Derrick," said Flint, "I'll do as you say. But I want you to answer me one question before—before you go. Was there any one else on this side helping you?"

The boy shook his head.

"No one. I've been working on my lone ever since I left England. I'm speaking the truth, Flint, honestly."

"Good Lord, I know that! Of course you are."

He hesitated.

"Have you any—any one, you'd like to write to, Derrick? Any of your people?"

And as he spoke there came to Flint's mind the memory of the night in the farmhouse when the old Frenchwoman had heard of her son's death and Derrick had asked if in time of war a man were justified in doing anything he could to help his own people.

The boy shook his head, and Flint watching him wondered if after all he were breaking under the strain. His eyes were clouded with suffering, a tear trickled slowly down his cheek, his teeth were pressed deep into his lower lip, and yet, as though to prove his unconcern, he tried to smile.

"No," he said finally, "there's no one.

No one in the world. The only people I care for are here—in the battalion. So there's nothing to worry about. I've no papers of any kind. But if—if there's anything, Flint, and you, Mac, that you'd like to keep out of my things—I wish you would. I won't ask you to—perhaps you'd rather forget me."

"Thank you," said Flint. "I'll take something, if I may. And, Derrick, have you anything planned?"

"Yes," said the boy. "I'll manage. I'd rather it were in the open, though, and not down here. Do you mind?"

"There's not much time," said Flint wearily. "It must be getting near dawn now."

He found it difficult to speak. Hardened as he was to war's horrors this going out to die was far more terrible than anything he had thought possible. His duty as a soldier was clear, yet he had need of all his resolution and control to hide the pity and tenderness he felt toward the boy whose story he had heard.

Death on the battlefield was nothing. Had Derrick died at the head of his men fighting the Germans, he would have had no pity, only sorrow that the boy was no longer with him, and pride that he had met a soldier's end. But to die as Derrick would die, alone and friendless, knowing that by his very obedience to orders he had forfeited all right to live, seemed to Flint a grim and tragic mockery of all they fought for. Yet Derrick must die, as the men of Garnett's battery had died, because the world was at war.

He led the way up to the trench.

"You'll stay here and let me go on by myself, Flint, won't you? I'd rather," said the boy.

The shelling had ceased. In the east the sky was a pale saffron. A solitary star shone in the dusky blue. A faint breeze blew from the north bearing with it the scent of Summer.

Flint drew in a deep breath.

"It's going to be a fine day," he said slowly.

The boy, his face clear-cut and very pale in the half-light, stood by his side.

"Yes, it will be a fine day."

The two small privates were fast asleep, huddled up in a corner of the trench, still gripping their rifles.

"Poor little devils," said Flint. "I forgot all about 'em."

"They've had a hard time of it," said the boy. "You wouldn't think to look at them that they were the men who've beaten the greatest fighting nation in the world. Look at them!"

Flint touched the boy's arm. The thought of Garnett killed by the side of his guns hardened his heart.

"Come on, Derrick," he said. "We can't waste any more time; I've not been to headquarters yet. They'll be worrying. Have you planned what you're going to do? There mustn't be any mistake about it, whatever it is."

The boy nodded.

"It will be all right, Flint, I'll take care." He hesitated. "I don't like to ask it, but I'd feel better if you and Mac would shake hands with me before I go. Will you?"

"Of course," said Flint, thrusting out his hand. "Why not? Good-by, kid. You're —— brave over it all. It's too late, now, but—I wish to God I'd shot that German in his own trenches."

The boy drew himself up and saluted. Then he turned and made off toward the front line. Flint watched him disappear around a bend in the trench.

* * *

"THERE goes one of the best soldiers I've ever seen. That's the finish, Mac. Poor, poor kid!"

A lump came to Flint's throat and he could not speak.

"Supposing he doesn't do it?" said MacDermott in a husky whisper. "Supposing he goes across to the Germans!"

Flint, conscious all at once of the pain in his bruised shoulder, answered him fiercely.

"I hope to God he does. But he won't, Mac. He'll never go back on his word. That's why I let him go."

As he spoke the stillness of the dawn was shattered by the crash of an exploding bomb.

"He's done it," said Flint. "Poor, poor kid! I was right, Mac. That's the end."

They waited on in the narrow trench until at last a man came running toward them, his face pale, his voice hoarse with the horror of the news he brought.

"Sir, Captain Flint, an awful thing's happened."

"Well," said Flint sharply, "what is it? Speak up, man!"

"There's been an accident, sir. Mr. Derrick's been killed by a bomb he was looking at."

THE OVERLAND FREIGHTERS

By E. A. BRININSTOOL

TO COMPILE even approximate statistics of the overland travel and freighting across the plains before the advent of the railroad, would be an impossible task. It is estimated however that forty-two thousand persons made the overland trip by wagon in 1849 alone. On the heels of this vast migration immense freighting facilities sprang up. By the '60's it is stated that sometimes as many as five hundred heavily-laden wagons passed old Fort Kearney in a single day. In 1865, six thousand wagons, each carrying from one to four tons of freight, passed this same post.

One firm alone, and that one the greatest—Russell, Majors & Waddell—at the height of their freighting operations employed six thousand two hundred and fifty wagons and seventy-five thousand oxen. These immense freighting wagons were seventeen feet long and six feet deep, with a capacity of from five thousand to sixteen thousand pounds each, and cost from eight hundred to fifteen hundred dollars each. First-class mules, five hundred to one thousand dollars a pair; harness, three hundred to six hundred dollars to the ten-mule team, besides salaries, provisions and incidentals. In brief, a first-class freighting outfit in the days of the plains travel cost as much as an up-to-date vestibuled passenger train of today.

The height of this freighting was the period from 1850 to 1869. The floating population then on the plains was about two hundred and fifty thousand. In 1865 over twenty-one million pounds of freight was shipped from Atchison, Kansas, alone, requiring 4,917 wagons, 8,164 mules, 27,685 oxen and 1,256 men.

The tariff of the overland freighters between Atchison and Denver—six hundred and twenty miles—averaged as follows: flour, nine cents per pound; sugar, thirteen and one-half cents; bacon and dry-goods, fifteen cents; whisky, eighteen cents; glass, nineteen and one-half cents; trunks, twenty-five cents; furniture, thirty-one cents.

The above is the tariff on a very small portion of what constituted a freighter's load. Everything went by pounds. The trip from Atchison, Kansas, to Denver, Col.—620 miles—took twenty-one days for wagons drawn by horses or mules; five weeks for ox-trains.

Another of the greatest of these freighters and stage-line kings was Ben Holliday. At the height of the overland business he operated nearly five thousand miles of daily mail stages, with about five hundred coaches and express wagons, five hundred freight wagons, five thousand horses and mules, besides a host of oxen.

On the main line he used two thousand seven hundred and fifty horses and mules and one hundred Concord coaches. It cost fifty-five thousand dollars for the harness alone, and his feed bill was one million dollars a year. To equip and run this line for the first twelve months cost two million four hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars. The Government paid Holliday a million dollars a year in mail contracts. In 1864 grain was twenty-five cents a pound along the line, and hay as high as one hundred and twenty-five dollars a ton. In a single day, one of Holliday's grain buyers contracted for seven Missouri River steamers to load with corn for Holliday's army of horses and mules!

On top of all this was the tremendous losses occasioned by the Indian depredations. Between 1864-1866 the savages so crippled his stage line—nearly all the stage stations for a hundred miles being burned, the stock stolen and the men killed—that the loss was close to half a million.

But Alexander Majors was probably the best-known and best-loved of all the overland freighters. He died about 1900. He was a Kentuckian, a Christian gentleman, who never drank, never swore and who made every one of his employees sign a contract not to drink, swear or gamble, under penalty of dismissal from his service.

Majors' stage line from Denver to Salt Lake had a run of over six hundred miles without a single town, hamlet or house on the entire route. Between Leavenworth and Denver he had one thousand mules and fifty coaches. The first of these "hoss-power Pullmans" reached Denver May 17, 1859, occupying six days for the six hundred and sixty-five-mile journey. Horace Greeley, editor of the New York *Tribune*, was one of the passengers.

But the coming of the railroad across the plains in 1869 drove romance forever from the great silent stretches, just as the advent of the telegraph made the Pony Express but a memory.

The Camp-Fire
A Meeting Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

THE American Legion, suggested and originally organized by us of the Camp-Fire, was turned over to the Government in December, 1916, and thereby went out of existence as a private organization. Only partial use was made of it, but that was not the Legion's fault and the work it was doing beforehand is the same work the Government has had to do since we went into the war. Military authorities considered it the most practical step taken for defense before the war, and it had high value as propaganda in a country that at the time certainly needed to be waked up to the peril that has since materialized. We need feel only proud of the organization we started.

Even after a year and a half men try to join it. Its mail still comes in and is forwarded from its old address to me. From its former secretary, Dr. John E. Hausmann, I hear frequently. He is a captain in the Quartermaster's Department, though he preferred the Medical Corps and is trying to get to France. From what I can hear the reason he doesn't get to France is that he has made himself too valuable where he is and they won't let go of him. Here's luck to him and may he see France. In several letters he has sent his regards to the Camp-Fire and I transmit them herewith.

I ADMIT I didn't even suspect the allegory in his story in this issue until Mr. Lyle told me about it. It might be well if those of you who are as dull as I would not read what follows until you've read the story. We took it because we liked it as a straight story. The allegory part, therefore, is velvet so far as we are concerned, but knowing about it beforehand might check the swing of the story itself.

> I suppose you have noticed that this story has a stolen plot—that I stole it from the Great War, with Germany and the Entente fighting for Supremacy and Jonathan Sam standing by (at least he was then), and Supremacy changing from a brute physical creature to something more spiritual, endangered by the wolves of anarchy as Civilization begins to break down. But anyhow, if you don't enjoy the allegory, don't let it spoil the story for you, please.—Eugene P. Lyle, Jr.

HERE'S part of a letter from Frank H. Huston which I pass on to you. "Uncle Frank" knew the Indians intimately in the old days:

> Some tribes scalped differently, as did individuals; occasionally (the latter) skinning whole head, again, with ears attached, or pieces from the side of the head, but the "lock" differed. Some Atlantic coast tribes shaved and left a piece extending to forehead like the dewdad on a Roman helmet or shaved all but the actual lock, the "whorl" at back of head.
>
> Plains tribes did not shave head, being neither Mussulmans or Mongols.
>
> BEFORE scalp dried it was stretched on a little hoop and cured, then trimmed and pared, and when attached to articles of dress the skin part was rolled into size and shape of pencil or little finger and attached. How do I know? Well, after having been called a "damned gowl" by an army officer I surely ought to know. Had not all my effects been destroyed some years ago by a fire would send you some samples, bona fide ones at that, but not as well fixed up as Injun cured. But greater honor than taking a scalp was batting a strike or "coup" with the hockey or shinny-shaped coup stick. Remember Many or Plenty Coups, Ty Cobb, as it were, of his day, or is it Honus? Any squaw could kill or scalp, but to hit a corpse or "blesse" with the coup-stick in the heat of action was a greater achievement and so honored.
>
> SURE I got a medicine-bag, and have opened many a one, same as we used to open the skin-wrapped dead uns stuck up on pole platforms when lucky enough to find them. When the upright skin poles rotted and fell, or were blown down, the varmint cleaned up the rubbish, but sometimes a comparatively fresh one was found and even to windward was far from fresh. Those book or closet ethnologists, and some of the field variety, suffer from a species of strabismus, even can't see what is before their nose or distort it from their civilized view-point, sort of like English and French view of *our* customs, etc.—"them us an' us them."
>
> Look into the political economy of Dakota Confederacy, its pure democracy, and find that "men of wealth" did not exist, or they gathered wealth only to turn over to the clan or tribe and so "acquire

merit." Red Cloud, three separate times was worth or gathered Injun wealth to the value of an American equivalent of $20,000 and other "big chiefs" nearly as much, all of which was gathered, not for personal use, but for the tribe.

THE word Dakotah, meaning men, typifies "them people." They *were* men, except in the eating line. There was nothing an old-time plains Injun would not eat, except apples and fish. After one had seen a buck with a yard or two of milk guts hanging out of his jaw, a hunk of raw, hot liver in one hand, and a gob of the undigested contents of the critter's paunch in the other for a vegetable relish, one could understand why you could smell 'em a mile to windward. Summer camps were not bad, but Winter camps, Wooh! The trenches in Yoorup aren't in it. Every one stripped at night even at forty degrees below. Just naturally had to or be eaten alive. My skin crawls yet and it's fifty years or more. (A strange fact is that the Yankee troops had more lice than ours. Why? Never could reason it out.) A Texas law used (if not now), to prohibit Injuns entering or living within the borders of the State. Too much Comanche, and by-the-by, the Comanches used to have a queer scalp-lock, approximating the Pawnees' and Kioways', who were undoubtedly of the same original stock.

And the plains Indians or meat-eaters used to have a profound disgust for the N. W. tribes whom they termed "fisheaters," as an Englishman uses the term Hun, or an American, wop, dago, mick or hunk.

PLEASE don't say skunk-skin but "taft-skin." And "pipe" ceremonies varied, in some, presented with both hands, bowl to right or left. Pipe in council passed, if I remember, to left-hand party. Hard to remember after so many years. Any old pipe would not do, certain pipes for certain occasions, and "pipe-keepers" who guarded the same. Smoking was religious or ceremonial, as on occasion of receiving visitors, councils, powwows, and was sucked like a Chink sucks a dope-pipe. Everything per ritual; in fact, their whole lives were per ritual. Do you know the reason of the waddling shuffle of the squaws? Roping. And the law of the roping of the legs, and the many ways it was done and penalties for violation? Do you know the working of what whites would call divorce? That women were *not* bought as wives, except occasionally a captive? That the *home* pertained to the squaw; she could fire the buck out if she felt like it? Oh, heaps of things that nine-tenths of the book-writers never fathomed.

AND do you remember how the army and plainsmen roared in mirth when the Meeker outfit women protested that the Injuns had been Galahads with them? First thing done was to violate the person of a woman captive, sometimes even in a fight.

And do you know of the milliards of secret societies and how some went broke buying captives from neighbors and giving 'em their liberty? A bunch of Yanktonais adolescents did that right after New Ulm and Col. Chivington and his 1st Col. Cav. at Sand Creek started the war that ended in '91 at Wounded Knee by massacring the So. Cheyennes who came in for a council? That "dog soldiers" were the police and were the only ones who could strike or man-handle or legally "bump" a tribesman? The voyagers mixed up dog soldiers with Cheyennes, who were not Dakotahs but conquered and incorporated with the latter.

AND do you know what caused the big cicatrices on breasts and shoulder-blades of the bucks? The ordeal of the Sun Dance and Rain in the Face, through enmity to the medicine-man who "slit" him, endured longer and busted more muscle and flesh than any other ever known. That marriage went by clans, the laws being frequently unobserved, but the violation frowned upon, as when an Eagle took a Turtle to wife? That a band was not always all one clan, but various weaker bunches who joined some well-known astute chief, or followed a famous war chief? That government was by the "elders" and not by individual chiefs, and that obedience to any order of a chief was voluntary and optional?

HI HO, I wish I was young again and those days were back! I'd drag the buffalo-head or throw back from the Sun Pole and receive my accolade and gain the three feathers that no squaw could ever gain or wear. Squaws with feathers in their hair! Whoo! instant death by the dog soldiers should one dare. Did you ever "tootle tootle" with the flute and then the "Twa" wrap up and sit under a blanket? Were you ever given a "common" name, did you ever gain a special name, did you ever glaum a name from a deceased enemy, etc.? And did you ever hear of "The Young Man whose horse would not go," otherwise "Standing Horse"? (He was not an Injun by birth.) And did you ever trade booze for "cattriges" and sell 'em to the Injuns? If not, make the sign rapidly by moving the open hands, palms facing, an inch or two apart, up and down in a chopping motion (meaning "stop" or, done quickly, "shut up,") or wave your hand, palm outward, right and left in front of you (meaning "no"; also, "enough," "no more").

WITH their new serial beginning in this issue the following from Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton will be of interest.

Father Jacques Marquette is generally considered the discoverer of the Mississippi River. By most historians the credit is given to Louis Joliet, who was trained for exploration work through many years and finally sent out to find the "great water" by the Governor of New France. Marquette, who had spent several years on the southern shore of Lake Superior and at the north end of Lake Michigan, had the Jesuit desire to find new lands and new peoples to bring into the church. He planned the trip for several years and it is possible that it was arranged that he and Joliet make the journey together.

AFTER their return from the voyage of discovery, which took them far down the river and back to Lake Michigan by way of the Illinois River, Marquette remained on Lake Michigan that he might return to establish a mission among the Illinois the next Summer. He wrote of his voyage and drew a map of the northern Mississippi valley, which he sent to Montreal, but he died about two years later after a visit to the Illinois.

Joliet, with complete accounts of his discoveries and a good map of the great valley and its waterways, hastened to Montreal. When only a few miles from the city his canoe was overturned in some rapids in the St. Lawrence and he barely escaped with his life. His map and account had only his memory as a basis, but these were sent to Paris at once.

Because of this accident, Marquette's journal and maps were the ones to receive publication a few years later, and early historians in this century credited him with the discovery. Researchers now generally give Joliet the credit, at least equal credit.

HOWEVER, though there are no records of actual discovery, any historian who has dug into original sources of information, grants readily that there is no doubt that some of the *coureurs de bois* reached the Mississippi and even went beyond it before Marquette and Joliet reached it June 17, 1673. These Frenchmen, trading without royal license as many of them did, were forced to keep their journeys secret. Many of them were forced to trade with the Dutch and English at Albany, N. Y., where they obtained goods and sold their furs. They were a wild, daring, irresponsible class of men, and there were several hundred of them in the region about the westernmost of the Great Lakes. Nothing daunted them, neither Indians nor the immensity of the wilderness, and there is no reason to doubt that more than one of them crossed the "great water," but never mentioned that fact when he returned to the St. Lawrence. Nicolet was within three days' paddle of the Mississippi River when he was on the Wisconsin forty years before Marquette arrived, and any *coureur de bois* had the information necessary to reach the Mississippi.

REUBEN GOLD THWAITS, who knew more of the history of the first days on the upper Mississippi than any other man, said there was no doubt that several *coureurs de bois* were ahead of Marquette and that it was even possible that an Englishman from the Colony of Virginia had penetrated to the great river prior to 1673. It was this statement that suggested the story, "Before Marquette."

We had been impressed for several years by the romantic story of the first French in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois and Michigan. It is a hazy story, the more alluring and romantic because so much is only suggested, because there are so few facts, and yet room, for reasonable but marvelous deductions.

THE life of the *coureurs de bois* is largely the basis for this. Few men have been given the opportunity for more wonderful adventures. Yet the very nature of their operations made publicity undesirable and historical allusions little more than imagination-arousing conjectures. There were, however, some able, upright men among them, as Nicholas Perrot, and in "Before Marquette" we have tried to show the worst and the best of the *coureurs de bois*.

Our information was obtained entirely from original sources, some works, as Perrot's, having just been published in English. The Jesuit Relations have long been known, but Perot, in what was intended as a confidential report to the Intendent of New France, told of his life of thirty years on the Great Lakes and Upper Mississippi River and gave minute descriptions of the Indians, their many inter-tribal wars, their migrations, and also their customs, habits, etc.

THE American public has never understood the Indian and has never known what he is really like. Fiction, massacres and the results of injustice had induced queer conceptions, and yet the Indian of the upper Mississippi valley before the coming of white men was far different than he is today. One reason for drawing a more intimate sketch of the Sioux was to show how vastly different he was from the man Custer met in Wyoming.

Another thing that has never been recognized in fiction, and by only one historian, and that is the effect of the fur trade on the spread of civilization. It was for fur and fur alone that all the first trails were blazed, and the story of the upper Mississippi, down to the fall of the fur trade less than a hundred years ago, has been duplicated in Canada and the history of discovery there.

WE WERE both born and have lived much of our lives in the region described in "Before Marquette." Many of the scenes are familiar to us, though it is hard to imagine Marquette Wintering at the forks of the Chicago River after seeing the man-made river of today. We have paddled many of the streams *Dick Jeffreys* traversed, have camped where he camped, and in writing the story have lived over again many of our experiences. We have sat for hours on the great bluff from which *Dick* first saw the "great water," and now we are confronted with the necessity of forgetting *Dick* and his journeys. If we don't, we'll really believe he did discover the "father of waters."—KATHRENE and ROBERT PINKERTON.

THE suggestion, by C. R. Rollings at a recent Camp-Fire, that we should pay our tribute to the late Jack London has met with such response that there is not room for all the tributes that have come in. Nor is there need of all of them in print; the fact that they came is the important one, and one or two can typify our Camp-Fire feeling for the great and loved adventurer who has left us.

Personally I never met him and our slight acquaintance is limited to a letter or two and to the fact that he was an interested member of our Camp-Fire. And yet even the few written words from him are sufficient to establish him as what he was—not just a famous writer and adventurer, but a real man. It is only this simple tribute that I can pay him from my own acquaintance with him, yet if you understand that simple tribute as it is given you will know it is high praise.

Let us listen to the words of our comrade of the writers' brigade, J. Allan Dunn, and to the poem he has written to his friend:

HEARTILY in accord with the suggestion of Mr. Rollings at a recent Camp-Fire, I feel that the memoriam of Jack London is, in a measure, up to me. In all probability he and I were more intimate than was the case with other members of the Camp-Fire who personally knew him but this privilege but makes me feel the more inadequate to fulfil the task.

I think one of the greatest attributes of Jack London was the brave gentility of his spirit. In the beginning all things were against him, he trailed in the mire by force of circumstance, he saw the seamy side of the world, and, while his spirit revolted against the injustice, the inhumanity that he encountered, so that in youthful bitterness he accounted himself an outlaw, yet his inherent sweetness was unspoiled and when his full manhood was achieved, his soul used his harsh experiences only as a means to better sympathize and understand and to treat them as a flux by which his genius crucibled the real impulses of humanity.

MANY there are who have set Jack London down as a roughneck and a Socialist, little knowing the man. There have been attempts to show him as lacking in American patriotism, as a pacifist. A pacifist! Jack London was ever a fighting man. A biography of him might aptly be styled A Fight with Fortune. He was always fighting, against poverty, against lack of education; he fought for opportunity, he wrote for years before he achieved either recognition or a bare livelihood; he fought for years against sickness, with a body weakened in the very beginning by the lack of fair food and lodging, weakened yet more by stomach troubles, aggravated by the hardships of his travel in strange seas and lands under unfavorable conditions, his nervous system largely smashed by tropical sun-rays in the *Snark* voyage. His spirit maintained a false but vibrant virility. It was ever buoyant, ever generous. I have known many days when Jack London fought off sickness to accomplish his allotted task, and at the very end, he wrote until the final unconsciousness overcame him. *And he always fought smiling.* Obstacles to him were only things to be surmounted. He bucked his way to the mastery of words, he never ceased to study. When navigation was wanted he went at it while handling his own roving vessel and mastered it—*Smiling.* He was a magnificent fighter. He loved life and loved to live, and the pity of it was that one so truly vital, so eminently understanding of the prime motives of us all, should have gone in his prime.

TO ME he is not dead. He was on his way to visit me when stricken down and now the memory of him, the inspiration of him is so vivid, so enlivening that I know his spirit moves and has its being in some strong measure here. If I meet him on some stretch of Elysian sand he will be no stranger and the place will be no longer strange. If, according to certain creeds, he and I should meet in Hades, that spot will have lost much of its allotted terrors—and Jack London will still be smiling.

He was nearly read out of the Socialist party for his "Iron Heel" in which he conservatively—according to his own conviction—set the Socialistic millennium hundreds of years ahead and hinted that it must come from within, born of a universal desire. He separated himself entirely from the party when he found its trend was against the Democracy of America and the participation of that democracy in behalf of the rights and freedom of its citizens and their allies.

SOCIALISM to him was an ideal and, with maturer years and judgment, he did not always find himself in harmony with the actions of its more ardent propagandists. Yet always he welcomed those he had styled "comrades" in the days of his trampdom and social outlawry. Seldom was the little cabin on the ranch at Glen Ellen without some vagrom occupants, exploiting Jack London. It got to be so bad that, in sheer defense, Mrs. London and Nakata, most lovable and faithful of Japanese majordomos, conspired to stop the lavish food supplies and Jack was himself brought to see that his generosity was being abused. Yet Jack, in the dead of night, would steal down silently and rob his own cellar, burglarizing the lock and packing a sack of flour and a ham across the ranch to set it down outside the door where those ever-sleepy "brethren" of his drowsed content in their belief in Jack's easy hospitality. Besides this, he held out a sure hand of encouragement and employment for certain men who had served their time in San Quentin or Folsom.

Nor, with a hundred calls on him, with his words worth each one what would have bought him a meal in earlier days, did Jack ever hesitate to set aside his own affairs and help some struggling author or to welcome a boys' school or some such caravan that came to see Jack London. He was pre-eminently human. Adversity sweetened his spirit rather than soured it, and prosperity—self won—still further ripened it.

JACK rode fearlessly, he could sail his ship and guide it, he could swing a coaching-team skilfully across skiddy pitches and tool them with the utmost chivalry and appreciation of their efforts. He swam like a Kanaka and dived like Neptune. Apparently he never tired. He was a he-man who stood up and grinned at trouble, was absolutely frank in self-analysis and confession and held a charity toward the weaknesses and backslidings of others, coupled with the will and action to help, that made him a potent example of real Christianity.

A strong spirit and a sweet one. Unaffected, despite all rumors. Jack abominated a stiff collar because he felt better without one. Never was a man who posed less.

THE story-teller absolute, his tales echo with reality because he wrote only of what he knew, what he had seen, enlivened with his genius, his intuition for what a man must feel. And always he sought and traveled so that his store of knowledge, so largely unused, might increase. Absolutely lacking in conceit, he called his wonderful technique "tricks." He was the first to acclaim merit in others and the first to abominate charlatanry of all kinds, save as he might forgive it in his friends for the better sides of them he knew. "Brass tacks," he would cry, when guests spoke metaphysics. "We are living now, we can not get away from the 'now.' Get down to brass tacks. Let us argue along tangible lines."

Jack London was a living answer to that vexed question of whether an adventurer can ever forsake the camp-fire for the home-side hearth and whether the love of woman can ever take the place of the wander-love. Of the wonderful intimacy between

Jack London and Charmian London I shall say little. Its ties were and are sacred as they were perfect. I do not cite them as an example. Their unity was made up of an affinity welded and refined by understanding, sacrifice, unselfishness that is only too rare. But he showed that the true wanderer need not go mateless.

No one can analyze genius. London wrote of what he had seen and heard and lived, his *motif* was life and the red blood of him tinctures the ink in which his words are printed. Jack London the writer, lives in his books. Jack London the man, was, despite his differences with the propaganda of that party to which he felt himself intuitively affiliated, a true Socialist. He was plucky, he was generous to a fault, utterly unselfish, absolutely frank. To all who came in contact with him he was a true comrade.

AND man and writer are indissolubly linked. He called up the nomad spirit of his own Nordic race, the "vanishing blond," as he was wont to style it. He challenged, he challenges, in all of us the viking mood, the desire to go beyond the rim of things, to fight, to conquer if possible, or to go down fighting—and smiling. He lifted us out of the commonplace, he made the daily round less sordid for a while, he revived romance in hearts made dull by drudgery and this not less by the clear fire of his own fighting manhood as by the flame of his genius. By all the tokens he was a man.

A few of us who knew him very well, and know the deeds he did in secret as well as in the open, called him "Greatheart."

J. Allan Dunn.

To Jack London

FATE at the first thumbed down,
Ere he dreamed of renown,
Ground him in mire.
Still he vowed to achieve
Telling his soul—"Believe!"
Fanned spark to fire
Till it burst into flame.
The world thrilled with his name,
Filled with desire.

Sure was his genius' pen,
Writing of human men,
Telling of life.
Red blood ran in their veins,
Primal sap in their reins,
Masters of strife.

Hearts that were sore and dull
Read—and their lives were full.
Attics became a ship,
Routine a 'venture trip,
Coarse food a ration.
Sailed they the Seven Seas,
Faced they the tundra's freeze,
Dreamed 'neath an atoll palm,
Drifted in storm or calm,
Kings of Creation.

He left the memory clean;
Vesting things crude and mean
With touch inspired.
Sweet was his generous mind,
Kin he to all mankind,
As he desired.
Words are his monument,
Born of a good intent,
No idle fame!
So shall he rest content,
Love as his cerement,
GREATHEART his name.

J. A. D.

A RECENT letter from W. Townend showed him stationed in Ireland after going through most of the war on the French front. The following bears on his novelette in this issue:

The tale is not an effort of wild imagination. It is fiction, of course, but I did not write it without a good foundation of fact to build on. And, as I always say in almost every tale I write, in war the impossible becomes possible.

Story-writing is simply a matter of luck. It is difficult to find time and I am usually too busy to do more than a little work each day.

As you will see by the address I am now in Ireland. The weather is glorious, so is the country, the people are—well, beyond all understanding. I like them, but to understand them is quite another matter. Is there a solution to the Irish problem? I thought once there was. Now, having spoken to most classes of Irish, I am not so sure.—W. Townend.

FROM twenty-five miles from a railroad and 5,000 feet in the air comes greeting from one of us with word about a bit of the Old West:

Cake, Oregon.

This is an interesting country, a part of the "real Old West," and while most of the old landmarks in this section have wholly disappeared, the halo of romance still remains, fostered by the tales and reminiscences of the few yet living who were here during the stirring times of forty or fifty years ago when the Malheur and Mormon Basin placer mines were in the heyday of their frontier glory.

IN THIS county (Malheur) was the town of El Dorado, one of the first and liveliest camps of the early days, of which not a vestige remains at this time. Where at one time lived 6,000 to 7,000 people, with nicely built, painted houses, a 75-room hotel, lots of stores, saloons, dance-halls, etc., etc., nothing is left, not a board or brick, nothing except the glamour of its remembrance. In fact in driving along the road one would never know that a thriving and prosperous community had ever existed there. Originally the town was the headquarters of the Eldorado Ditch Company, who constructed a ditch 160 miles long to bring the water to these rich places. Some idea of the magnitude of the enterprise may be gained from the fact that the rents for the privilege of using this water ran as high as $150,000 to $175,000 in the total, annually.

SEVERAL miles from the site of Eldorado is the town of Malheur, known in the early days as "Malheur City," which was also one of the principal headquarters of the early-day placer-miners. Here still remain a few stores and houses, and an Odd Fellows' Hall, reminiscent of the "good old days," inhabited by possibly fifty or sixty people, but all the "glory" of former days has long since departed.

Several miles beyond Malheur, right by the road and in the midst of the sage-brush-covered prairie, is a small bright green spot, enclosed by a fence, where the luxuriant grass still thrives from the adjacent spring—as it were, an oasis in the desert. Here, away off by itself, once flourished a prosperous brewery, located there on account of the water being particularly adapted to the manufacture of beer—good beer and, believe me, lots of people wish it were still there, but alas! nothing remains but the grass and the spring.

STILL farther on is the site of the old town of Amelia, where naught but a battered old outhouse remains of a busy and populous community of forty years ago. A few miles beyond lies Mormon Basin, said to have been one of the richest placers in the world and originally located by the Mormons—tradition tells us they used to carry the gold away by wagon-loads. I have never heard this verified by any one who saw the "wagon-loads," but the fact remains that it was one of the richest districts ever known. Placer-mining is still carried on in a small way by one or two who employ the few old Chinamen yet remaining of the many who were brought there in the early days (Chinese were always used, preferentially, in this work on account of their inherent honesty; at least, it is said, a greater percentage of them were honest than of other nationalities).

MILLIONS of dollars in gold was produced from these big rich placers and we are told that the "mother lode" which fed them has never yet been discovered by reworking the old ground with more modern methods. We occasionally see one of the old-time prospectors, still searching for his "ledge," always cheerful and optimistic and will be until the end.

This whole section of country is replete with legends and traditions, romantic and interesting, dealing with the early life amongst the sturdy pioneers, the miners and Indians—a good field for the historian and story-writer, with ample room for the exercise of his talents.

The writer first came West as a boy in 1880, living on the Idaho frontier, where many exciting events happened, and is glad indeed to note the Camp-Fire's efforts to correct errors and preserve authentic records of those events and happenings incident to that stirring and strenuous period as well as of the people who participated therein and helped make history.—"Q."

THROUGH the courtesy and thoughtfulness of Mr. B. W. Denison, Sunday editor of the Chicago *Herald*, I received the following telegram:

April 17, 1918.

Arthur J. Hayes died Tuesday at Camp Grant of pneumonia.

He is the second of our comrades of the writers' brigade to die within a short time, and though he just as truly gave his life for his country as if he had died in the trenches, we know that he would rather have passed out fighting.

We will remember him for his stories, notably that fine dog story "The Epic of Silver King," but we remember him also as our comrade. Let us turn back to what he said to us something over a year ago when, according to our custom, he stood up and introduced himself to the Camp-Fire:

Chisholm, Minnesota.

Your forwarded letter was received in the Pelican Lake country several days ago. The half-breed trapper who obligingly brought it in from Orr was not returning, so I was unable to get my reply out more promptly. I have been on the trail of the vanishing lumberjack for the past week, endeavoring to tone up my local color for a series of stories. The old two-fisted, red-shirted calk-booted character of earlier eras has disappeared. The old tote-trails are grown in with grass, and the tar-paper flaps, a forlorn specter, on the ridge-pole of the camps that were. To-day they build with milled lumber, import "Jacks" who pack their belongings in straw suit-cases, and who have attained the effeteness of unions, labor agitation, and organized strikes, and drag the log-laden sleighs with caterpillar tractors. But to get to the autobiography:

WAS born in Duluth, Minnesota, in the early nineties. My earliest recollections are of that strip of strangely wild territory between the Mesaba Range and the Rainey River. Knew it when the Indians killed swimming moose with axes from canoes and shot whitefish endeavoring to leap Kettle Falls. Have vague recollections of the high ebb tide of the Seine River gold-rush, an aftermath of the Klondyke Frenzy, when thousands of gold-seekers poured into Mine Center in quest of an Ontario El Dorado. They poured out again, disgusted and disillusioned. The stamp-mills and shafts, long since abandoned, are among the show places of the Rainey.

It has been my lot, hitherto, to live rather on the fringe of things. Saw the only gold brick the Foley Mine ever turned out, and the troops that poured in after the Nett Lake fiasco in '99. Have ridden eight miles about one jump ahead of a forest fire, and witnessed the burning of Chisholm, in 1908, in the State's greatest conflagration. Knew most intimately, perhaps, all phases of the Minnesota lumberjack existence. Have seen him in his heyday and decline. There are some corking good tales in the old mackinawed Vikings of the pine country

HAVEN'T adventured myself, but have been rarely fortunate in meeting in the out-of-the-way places many a man who had. Have done cub-reporting, attended college, and instructed sundry classes in rhetoric. I like the lonesome trails and the men from the far horizon. Will annex an LL. B. in June, but aspire rather to journalism and fiction. The family have pioneered from my birth and have seen the older, wilder days of the Iron Ranges. Regret that I can not qualify with Camp-Fire's first-hand performers. Hope to break in later with something actually worth while.

Our salute to him, standing, hats off, and may his way be smooth over the Last Trail. ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

ADVENTURE'S FREE SERVICES AND ADDRESSES

These services of *Adventure* are free to *any one.* They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card—not* in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Back Issues of *Adventure*

Will give twenty-five cents apiece for copies containing my stories—"*The Greenstone Mask*," "*Gold Lust*," and "*The Island of the Dead*." Write and I will send money and necessary postage.
Address—J. ALLAN DUNN, care of *Adventure.*

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

Letter-Friends Back Home

A Free Service Department for American, Canadian, and Other Allied Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Others in Camp or at the Front.

Any one in the United States or Allied service who wishes to brighten the time with letters from "back home" or wherever else this magazine circulates, and with the personal touch and interest of hitherto unknown friends, can secure these letters and these friends by sending us his name and military address to be published once in this department as soon as censorship of soldiers' foreign addresses permits. In the meantime his address can be printed as "care *Adventure*," letters to be forwarded at once by us to the military address he gives us in confidence. Among our readers of both sexes, all classes and from all parts of the world, he is likely to gain a number of friendly, personal correspondents. He is free to answer only such as he is comfortably able to answer under the conditions that surround him, and it is even suggested that the number of correspondents for any one man be determined by the needs of his comrades as well as by his own.

This magazine, of course, assumes no responsibility other than the publishing of these names and addresses as its space will permit. Experience has shown that the service offered is a very real and needed one, and all not themselves in service are asked to do their part in making the daily life of those fighting in our defense brighter and pleasanter through personal friendships across the intervening miles and by whatever personal, human kindnesses such friendships may suggest.

When giving your military address make it as permanent a one as possible.

PRIVATE T. R. GIBSON, No. 17, C. M. A. C. Depot, Pisbono Barracks, Shorncliffe, Kent, England.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located one out of about every five inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 731 Guardian Building, Cleveland, O., in charge of preliminary organizing.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for Adventure Magazine by our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each month in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable and standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. Islands and Coasts
Captain A. E. Dingle, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
J. P. Tucker, Hotel Lansdale, 1410 Minor Ave., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. The Sea Part 2
Captain A. E. Dingle, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men, local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Tucker.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
Raymond S. Spears, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
Hapsburg Liebe, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

8. Western U. S. Part 2
Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson, Yankton, S. Dak. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially* early history of Missouri Valley.

9. Western U. S. Part 3 and Mexico Part 1
J. W. Robertson, 912 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

10. Mexico Part 2
J. W. Whiteaker, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Central and Southern Mexico below a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. History, geography, customs, government, animals, minerals, products and industries.

11. North American Snow Countries Part 1
Robert E. Pinkerton, 5036 Utica Ave., Denver, Colo. Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. R'y. Canoes and snowshoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

12. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
George L. Catton, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 4
Ed. L. Carson, Arlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game; minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

15. North American Snow Countries Part 5
Theodore S. Solomons, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing,

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back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

16. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 397 Monadnock Bldg., San Francisco, Calif. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

17. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, Nitro, West Va. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

18. The Balkans
ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Covering Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey (in Europe); travel, sport, customs, language, local conditions, markets, industries.

19. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

20. Japan and Korea
ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE, Mountain Lakes, N. J. Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios.

21. Russia and Eastern Siberia
CAPTAIN A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Quartermaster, U. S. Troops, Mercedes, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalin; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

22. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, 1604 Chapin Ave., Burlingame, Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

23. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Castle View, Meriden, Conn. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

24. ★ Africa Part 3 Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada, Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

25. Africa Part 4 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda, and the Upper Congo.
CHARLES BEADLE, Grand Isle, Louisiana. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

26. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

27. Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, 1106 Van Nuys Building, Los Angeles, Cal. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba. Or J. V. Knight, Director, Republic of Cuba News Bureau, Woolworth Building, New York.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

The following Ask Adventure editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Capt. A. M. Lochwitzky.

Auto Opportunities in South America

Question:—"I am an Australian, physically unfitted for any more war service by two years in Flanders and Gallipoli. I have studied the auto-tire repair business from A to Z, with the Goodrich Tire Works. Have just $250 cash. Is there an opening for me in South America—Brazil preferred? Do you know of any one with whom I might communicate as to the chances of repair business in Rio? I can't speak the lingo but can stenograph as a side line."—JOHN PHELAN, Akron, Ohio.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—If I am to advise you on South America, I must begin by stating frankly that I believe Argentina and Uruguay offer much the greater possibilities to settlers or immigrants.

Brazil is a great country; but the cultivated—or cultivatable—portion is settled to a far greater degree than other places; and business needs far more drumming up there than in the two countries I mention. One other thing is, that the language must be learned if a man expects to ever amount to much in business. You can easily realize that. If a Frenchman or Chinaman or Greek comes here, he can not carry on much business until he learns the language of the country, can he? Well, then; that's your position in South America, without the language. In Brazil you need Portuguese; in most of the other places Spanish is used.

Your knowledge of stenography is under the same handicap. Not many concerns can afford to employ clerks with only one language, if that one is a foreigner. There are, of course, a few openings; such as Government offices having much direct communication with America; but in general you'll find you need Spanish or Portuguese.

As for your capital, I'm afraid that won't do much more than carry you down there, buy a reasonable outfit, and keep you safe for a week or two until you strike something. My advice would be to try for a good agency—such as the Goodrich—and take it down with you; then you'd have a standby until your repair business got started.

Monte Video, or Buenos Aires are great cities, and equal to Rio in every way; and the back countries offer rather more openings than does Brazil. In Argentina—Spanish spoken here, as in Uruguay—there is a great and growing demand for cheap, light cars; and tire repairs must be in demand.

I believe if you will write to Francisco J. Yanes, Pan-American Union, Washington, D. C., stating your resources, wishes, and ability, he can give you some up-to-the-minute data on these places which will be rather more valuable than my experience of farther back, since the war has upset everything in the way of trade centers, ocean travel, and expenses. The same source will bring you data of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, or any South American Republic. If then you decide definitely where you will go, and want to know anything of a more intimate nature, such as outfit, customs, etc., I shall be happy to reply to you further.

Queen Charlotte and Porcher Islands

Question:—"I am getting ready to start to British Columbia and would like information on Queen Charlotte and Porcher Islands. Are they very heavily timbered or is there some open country on them suitable for stock raising? Also about the wild cattle on Queen Charlotte. How many are there? Who do they belong to and would any one be privileged to get them?"—Pink Becker, Westfall, Ore.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—There is very little heavily timbered land on the Queen Charlottes, most of it being very scanty with lightly timbered muskeg and many open spaces. It has the reputation of being a stock country for fair with a Winter that only needs feed enough to be an insurance against an unusually heavy snowfall. Write Deputy Minister of Lands, Victoria, B. C. for surveyors' reports. They have been surveying up there for years. Porcher has been pretty well taken up so far as good agricultural land is concerned but I understand that several claims have been allowed to lapse and that a man can find some pretty good stuff there yet.

As for the wild cattle, when the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway was projected, an old greaser known as "Mexican Tom" brought up a small herd and turned them loose near Bearskin Bay or Masset as it is now called intending to sell the increase to the contractors who built the road. By some means the big cattlemen of Alberta who had also established herds in advance of the railway, got the company so tied up on a contract that it did not dare take Tom's cattle or even afford him transportation to the mainland where he might have disposed of them in independent markets.

In disgust the old fellow turned the bunch loose to shift for themselves and returned to the south, flat broke, preferring to lose all rather than sell to the men who had beaten him at their price. This was the origination of the wild cattle on the islands and there are several hundred of them still there according to report. I know the Jap miners from Judway used to come up every year and lay in their Winter's supply of beef at the cost of killing and transportation so it is a safe bet that any one else would have the same privilege.

This in itself should answer the question of the fitness of Graham Island as a stock proposition.

A Summer on the Great Lakes

Question:—"I am planning on spending the next Summer on the Great Lakes. What sort of boat will be the best adapted for going it single-handed? What kind of equipment should I take for best results? Would it be better to depend on camping at night or take a boat on which one could live permanently? I'll want to fish, take some pictures and just live. Would like to go among the islands of the upper lakes, I think. Where can one get charts of the Lakes and where may one purchase real 'has been' books or articles on trips of this sort? Where can I purchase a boat such as you advise and about how much will it cost?"—Asa I. Belt, Rockford, Ill.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—I rowed 450 miles or more on Lake Superior's North Shore, Lake Ontario, etc., in a 16-foot skiff. I carried water-proof tarpaulins, woolen blanket, cooking outfit, duffle bag, a box of grub, etc. I was abroad in August and September, and I think you are looking ahead to the time of your life, basing my judgment on my own experiences.

If you want to live right outdoors, go in a rowboat. Carry with you ash, hickory, basswood or other hoops, and canvas to spread over the top of your boat. Carry light anchor, light line, and anchor in little bays or river mouths, or drag your boat up the beach out of the way of the waves.

Sleep on board, in a bunk made of heavy canvas, swung along both sides and by the ends to sides and stern of boat. Swing it low, but clear of the bottom by three or four inches. Carry a little oil-stove, to cook under the canvas cover in rains—which are not frequent.

Write to *Outing Magazine*, New York City, *Field and Stream*, New York City, *Forest and Stream*, New York City, for book catalogs of skiff and boat trips. I wrote my experiences for A. R. Harding, Columbus, Ohio, who got them out in book form "A Trip on the Great Lakes," which will help you, I think. I don't know the price of the book, seventy-five cents or a dollar, I think. It tells what I saw, and what I did.

Get the charts of lakes you want from U. S. Lake Survey Office, Detroit, Michigan.

If I were you, I should go to Chicago, and look along the water-front and boat liveries and clubs, for bargains in boats. You could find a very good boat via Sears, Roebuck & Co., or Montgomery Ward & Co. (skiff), or small motor-boat, through *Motor Boating* or *Motorboat* (get copies through newsdealers). Good rowboat, first hand, $30 to $40. If you got a $50 18-foot rowboat, and put in outboard motor, you would have ideal outfit, but I've rowed thousands of miles with oars.

Get a $2.00 or $5.00 fishing license for Ontario waters, from game overseers—important towns—and visit customs office and obtain pleasure cruising permit. You would go up Michigan, across to North Shore, along The Soo—through Canal—and into North Shore of Superior.

The Red Lake Country

Question:—"I would like some information on Beltrami County, Minnesota, the section around Red Lake. Is this section thickly settled and how is the hunting and fishing? Could I find a trapper's hut to stay at during the Winter? Are there good waterways so I could do most of the traveling by canoe? Could I rely upon a rifle for a grub stake? Or would the hunting and fishing be better around the Lake of the Woods? Is there any trapping in this section or is the best of the land covered?"—Chas. Haney, Olean, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Pinkerton:—The country to the south, east and west of Red Lake is pretty well settled, while that to the north, mostly a great spruce swamp, is being drained by the State and Government and settlers are coming in. Where it is not drained, there are stretches as big as a township in which there is not a dry place big enough for a tent. In some places the rivers run underground.

Where settlers are not taking up the drained land, homesteaders are taking claims for the pulp spruce. This is especially true around the Big and Little Fork Rivers. Moreover, north of Red Lake there are still a number of Indians, and there is an Indian school on the lake. Between Red Lake and Rainy River there are some good stretches unsettled, and you can get into the country by canoe on the Rapid River, though along the stream you will find settlers.

There are deer, moose, bear and wolves in this section, the fisher skins are very good because of the thick spruce growth. You might be able to find a deserted cabin in which to stay, and undoubtedly there is land to be trapped. The old rules don't hold there, and it is the first man in. Near the Lake of the Woods, on the Minnesota side, the country is quite thickly settled. You most assuredly can not rely upon a rifle for a grub stake.

Birmingham, Alabama

Question:—"My husband has just signed a contract as draftsman with a concern in Birmingham, Ala. They tell him there's no malaria there and people do not mind the heat although it rises to 130 at times. Now we have two babies the oldest two and a half years of age; my health has not been the best this Winter and I hesitate about going there with the children this Spring. Please advise me about the climate. We are Northern people having lived for the past ten years in New York State so are used to a cool climate.

"Also how about domestic life? Are the colored people accepted as help by the whites in preference to white servants? My husband thinks I can get a colored servant there cheaply, have an electric fan or two and thereby stand the heat this Summer. Is there electricity to be had there?"—Mrs. E. W. Barnhart, Emsworth, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Liebe:—No two persons, of course, will tell you the same things concerning the healthfulness of any particular city. Here, frankly, is what I think of Birmingham:

I regard it a pretty good Southern city, as to climate and about everything else. Mosquitoes, save in rare instances, are not what we down here think of as bad. The draining of dead water has worked wonders with the mosquito problem, and consequently with malaria, in most such Southern cities. The sanitation, I understand, is good.

As to the thermometer rising to 130—that must be a mistake. The highest ever reported by the Weather Bureau was but 104. The mean July temperature of Birmingham is but 5 degrees more than that of Pittsburgh. People there, most of them, do not think of it as an uncomfortably hot place in Summer. However, they are mostly Southern people, while you are a Northerner. It would be better if you could go down there in the Autumn. If you go in the Spring, I advise you to go as early as is possible; you will consequently get into the Summer gradually.

Yes, negroes are generally accepted as the best help in Birmingham. But it will be much to your advantage to investigate a little when you hire a negro woman; demand references, I'd say, and then do a little telephoning to make sure those references are genuine. Handled just right, negroes make the very best servants in the world.

As to electricity, yes, they have it. Birmingham is quite a city. I fancy you will like the place a good deal better than you now think.

I trust that you will not be disappointed in our Southland.

Central American Opportunities

Question:—"Are there any openings in any Central American country for young Americans with the United Fruit Co.? Do they hire men in the U. S. as checkers, foremen, etc., who have no experience in this line? Can you give me names and addresses of parties with whom to file applications? Will they pay fair salaries?"—J. W. Robertson, Cedar Park, Tex.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—The United Fruit Co. has pretty much of a monopoly of the fruit industry in Central America and is by far the best company to locate with. They hire a great many of their men down there—fellows who drift in—but they also send young men down from here once in a while and teach them the business after they arrive. Some of the men in charge down there are as follows:

G. M. Shaw, Manager Guatemala Division, Puerto Barrios, Guatemala; V. M. Cutter, Manager Tela Divn., Tela, Honduras; R. H. Goodell, Manager U. F. Co., Puerto Cortez, Honduras; W. E. Mullins, Manager C. R. Divn., San José, C. R.; J. M. Kyes, Manager, Bocas Divn., U. F. Co., Bocas del Toro, Panama.

You also might write: C. H. Ellis, Vice-Pres. United Fruit Co., 321 St. Charles St., New Orleans, La.

The salaries are good, ranging from $75 to $150 and promotion is rapid provided a man stays sober and works hard.

Mining in Africa

Question:—"What chance has a man to make a stake in Africa as mining foreman or some such position? I am familiar with all branches of mining. Is there any placer-mining, or any established concerns? Is there much danger from fever, etc.? I am robust but have never been in the tropics. What arms and ammunition would be best to take along for hunting?"—Chas. Anderson, Houghton, Mich.

Answer, by Mr. Miller:—The chief mining district of Africa is the Rand, South Africa, a part of the world I only know by reading and acquaintance with men from there. It is not tropical, but a temperate climate, not unlike Arizona. The rough labor is done by natives and imported Indians and Chinese, bossed by whites. Wages and living conditions are good.

On the West Coast, with which I am more familiar in a general way, there is considerable gold mining on the Gold Coast, though someways inland, and in northern Nigeria they are mining tin. But no placer-mining, to my knowledge, is done in Africa. The wages on the West Coast are good, but the country is unhealthy, yet not so bad if one lives temperately. Personally fever troubled me little, but that depends largely on the district, it being very unhealthy around the river deltas.

An experienced mining foreman would have no trouble whatever in getting a good-paying job, if he can handle natives, and they're easy enough to handle if one has handled men at all. The usual contract calls for three years, with three months' notice either side to break it. The companies pay out-going passage, and return passage if the three years are carried out.

Take only a shotgun. There is a heavy license on every gun a white takes through customs, as the authorities are very careful not to let the natives get hold of firearms. You can easily pick up a rifle or sporting gun from some fellow coming home.

I will hold this letter over a few days, until I go up to San Francisco, where I will get the names and addresses of mining companies in Africa and enclose them. You might write them, stating briefly age and experience. Two of my correspondents landed African positions last month that way.

Gold in the Southwest

Question:—"In what parts of Arizona and old and New Mexico is gold to be found? I would like to prospect in the Southern States. Is there any way to get other work, in the mines or the woods, near the gold area?"—Lois Pincher, Milwaukee, Wis.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—All three of the places mentioned by you are highly mineralized, but you can not get across the border now, so old Mexico may be left out of consideration. Copper is far more generally found than gold in Arizona, but the desert regions have many deposits of gold. Death Valley, partly in this State, has much. It is a horrible place to go. Oatman, Arizona, near Needles, has the largest producing gold-mine in the State. Northwestern Arizona is promising country for prospectors, as is southwestern and northern New Mexico, but you should have some man with you who knows the country, as it is arid and dangerous.

There is work among the mines in both States. You mention work in the woods near mining area. Most of the mining is done where mesquite trees are the biggest they find, and they are scrubby little things. Some few mines are found in forested sections, but not the bulk of them. You will find work where they have ranches of various kinds.

There are known deposits of gold in large quantities that are still unworked because of no water within sixty miles. That is the kind of country you will traverse in prospecting. Desert, hotter than the old furnace into which the three Israelites were thrown, drier than powder-mill or dry-kiln, full of alkali dust and whirlwinds. Me, I'll get my gold in some other way, thank you. I am too amphibious to like desert for more than a week at a stretch.

The South Sea Islands

Question:—"What race of people in habit the South Sea Islands? What are their customs, history and religion? What opportunities do these islands offer an adventurer? What is the best and easiest way there? What money do you think necessary to cover expenses? Is there any way to make money while there? What sort of an outfit is needed? Where can I get a book and map of these islands?"—Raymond Mossburg, Baltimore, Md.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—There is much mystery surrounding the whence of the South Sea Islanders, and ethnologists still dispute about it. Why should I theorize where men on the spot can't agree? Some say they are ancient Malayans, others that they sprang from Egypt. I'm satisfied that they are a fine race of South Sea Islanders for at least 500 years. That's far enough back, surely.

Their customs are various and pagan, like their religion — sun-worshipers, cannibals, offerers of living sacrifices, tremendously superstitious, believers in evil spirits, charms, incantations, and strangely mixed in these later days with Christianity, for missionaries have done great work in the islands during the past century, whole islands, such as Rarotonga and Tonga, becoming professing Christians.

Their history I can not give you. So far as the islands are concerned, adventures are to the adventurous. Plenty of sea-loom, myriad islands, differing peoples—surely there is the setting for adventure. The best way out to the islands for Americans is either from Vancouver or San Francisco, whence mail-boats and other craft go to Honolulu, which is an ideal kicking-off place for the islands, of which there are numerous groups to choose from.

Honolulu is a good place to get an outfit, which only means, after all, a tropical equipment of clothes. Money? Just what sort of spender are you? You can get rid of as much cash in the islands as you can in Baltimore—and you can live cheaper in the islands than in your own city. It all depends on whether you are a two-dollar-a-day man or upward. You can "do" the islands on five dollars a day. And, of course, money can make money as willingly in the islands as in Baltinore—with a maker behind it.

But there must be patience to make money as a trader or as a planter. Unfortunately, the things written about the islands are not available in books published in the U. S. A. so far as I am aware. As soon as the war is over, any shipping company trading to the islands will send you copies of their pamphlets, some of which are instructive and interesting. But the censor has forbidden the circulation of such just now.

Kia Ora!

LOST TRAILS

Note—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

ADVENTURE HAS FOUND ONE MAN OUT OF EVERY FIVE ASKED FOR

RASNER, JOHN (JOHN WESTLEY). Left Philadelphia about two years ago and was last heard from in Newville, a small town near Harrisburg, Pa. Height, 5 ft. 6 in., light hair, blue eyes. Prominent baseball player. Recently he was reported to have been killed in action with Canadian Army in France but cannot prove report.—Address Mrs. Martie Rasner, 2331 Gerritt St. (Nr. 23rd and Reed), Philadelphia, Pa.

BEAUMIER, AUSTIN. Formerly of Laramie, Wyo. Send your address or any one knowing whereabouts write to—Address Harry M. Heller, Co. A, 4th Battalion, Pascagoula, Miss.

THORTON, "VIC." Last heard from in New Albany, Miss., in 1915. Write to Mike Wharton, care *Adventure.*

BROWNHILL, TIMOTHY and WILLIAM. The former is a solicitor and served his articles in Dallas City; afterward was a senator for Oregon State Parliament and also a journalist. He was in business at McNinnville for some time and also represented Yarnhill County, Oregon. Up to three years ago I was in touch with him but latterly I have not received a reply to several letters sent. WILLIAM BROWNHILL is a farmer or rancher.—Address A. PEARSON, Norwich Union Chambers, 34 Queen St., Melbourne, Australia.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

RUBLE, RALPH E., also known as R. E. RANDALL. Last heard of in San Antonio, Texas, Dec. 27, 1917. He was to leave that day for San Francisco. Any information will be greatly appreciated.—Address L. T., 369, care *Adventure.*

ALBRITTON, TOM. Left Mayfield, Ky., about 15 or 18 years ago. You should let your relatives know where you are. Also JESSIE B. ALBRITTON, née Tralle or Strickland, last heard of in Denver, Col., 12 years ago. Was then soon to be married; name of man not known.—Address C. B. ALBRITTON, Clarksville, Tenn.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

ROBINSON, JAMES and EDWARD. Last heard from at St. Johns Home, 49th St. and Lancaster Ave., about fifteen years ago. Any information from above parties will be thankfully received by their brother.—Address WILLIAM ROBINSON, 303 N. Front St., Philadelphia, Pa.

CARMICHAEL, ARCHIBALD. Native of Ayrshire, Scotland. At Willets Point with U. S. Sappers and Miners, 1864-1866. If his descendants will communicate I have information to their advantage.—W. CARMICHAEL, Box 647, Collingwood, Canada.

FULLER, WALTER WILLIAM, of Chefoo and Shanghai, China, who spent about 3 years in Canada 1894-1897 and believed to be in States since 1898, last heard of in Frisco about 1914, is requested to communicate with his son LIEUT. WILFRID ROBERT FULLER, "Bazancourt," Irving Road, West Southbourne, Hampshire, England, or to Lewis J. Parlane care of British Post-Office Box No. 154, Shanghai. Urgent.

O'CONNOR, FRANK. Native of Collingwood, Ontario, Canada. Last seen in the St. Charles Hotel, Toronto, Canada, over one year ago. Was then making for Arizona. MARVEN BROOKS, Canadian Navy, who survived the Great Lakes storm, and your old *Waubic* shipmate wishes you to write if this should catch your weather eye.—Address SAPPER WILLIAM BISSETT, Canadian Engineers, Camp Niagara on the Lake, Ontario, Canada.

HAYNE, EMIL. Shipped with me on the *Cassel* from Bremen. In August, 1913, was in Africa and Australia. Last heard from in Houston, Texas. Write to your shipmate.—Address GUS HAUSLER, 523 Washington St., Portland, Oregon.

ZACHON, JOHN. Last heard of in Monroe, Wis. About 5 ft. 9 in. in height, blue eyes, brown hair, sandy mustache. Any one knowing anything about his whereabouts will confer a favor by writing to his son.—Address PRIVATE OTTO L. ZACHON, Co. I., 10th Inf., Ft. Benjamin, Harrison, Ind.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the Mid-July or First August issues of *Adventure* They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

BATES, A. L.; Bell, John Watson (Jack); Crouse, Samuel Blake; Dickerson, Tommie; Donald, William James and John Henry; Fairchild, John; Foster, Dixon or Bert Foster; Fuller, Walter William; Hart, Albion W.; Hayne, Emil; Henderson, Al; Henderson, Mrs. Edith Houston; Jones, R. C. (Roy Clinton); Krause, Charles; La Brache, P.; Lough, Lyle (Slim); Loftis, Edward Marshall; Morgan, George Francis; Nelson, Erik; Niles, John Oches; O'Brien, James D.; Regener, Herman; Sherman, Colonel Elsw[illegible]; Sluder, Charlie; Stapleton, Bob; Tinsley, Thos. Ru[illegible]; Ussher, Lionel, Neville; Mrs. West; Wilson, Samuel William.

MISCELLANEOUS—Ingelow, Crump, Empey, Thurston, Nowell, Alexander Harrifield, Cassier; Sergeant Rome and Corporal Carroll.

HASTLAR GAL BREATH, Roy Ozmer, Ruth Gilfillan, Lee Hays.—JACK P. ROBINSON.

NUMBERS L. T. 284, C. 293, W. 311, W. 312, L. T. 343. Please send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you—Address HARRY ERWIN WADE, care *Adventure.*

THE TRAIL AHEAD

The First September *Adventure*, in your hands on August 3d, will contain the following red-blooded stories, besides those mentioned in the ad. on page 2:

MAKING GOOD FOR MULEY *By W. C. Tuttle*
Another roaring tale of the Piperock cowpunchers.

THE FRAYED STRAND *By Roy P. Churchill*
The story of a U. S. Navy man and how he "settled down" in Central America.

THE HONOR OF THE ESCADRILLE *By Gordon McCreagh*
High above the clouds, life is cheap to these daring flyers, but honor is paramount.

THE RAVEN MOCKER *By Hugh Pendexter*
Back to old Virginia this story takes you—to the time when white man fought the wily red men.

THE SEEDS OF WRATH *By E. S. Pladwell*
Something new in the way of South Sea Island missionary work.

THE GREASER *By Gordon Young and Jack Holt*
"They're all the same—these greasers," you say? Read this and see.

WITH PISTOL AND SECOND READER *By Hapsburg Liebe*
A story of the Tennessee hills—and a boy.

SKIRTS AND BRATS *By Louise Rice*
And the part they played in the life of an ex-convict.

CAPTAIN JINX *By Kingsbury Scott*
A stormy tale of the Great Lakes.

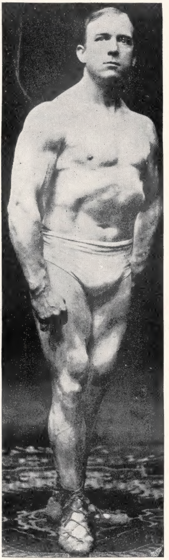
BEFORE MARQUETTE. Part II *By Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton*
Farther into the unknown West—meeting strange Indians—traveling unknown waterways.

FIRST SEPTEMBER ADVENTURE

WOULD THE LAW LET YOU MARRY?

When will the people of this country finally wake up to the fact that only by taking care of posterity can it become the greatest of all world forces? There is much agitation all over the United States over the law of Eugenics, and some States have been wise enough to insist upon a medical examination of the two contracting parties to a marriage before a license is issued, and although the propaganda of those at the head of this movement is, perhaps, not fully understood or appreciated, there is no one who can conscientiously deny their sincerity or the ultimate good that would result.

Through the adoption of a law whereby the physically unfit were barred from marriage in every State of the Union, there would, indeed, be a relatively small percentage of the population who would measure up to the standard.



LIONEL STRONGFORT
The world's strongest and most perfect athlete, whose unaccepted challenge of competition to the greatest living "strong man" still stands

WOULD YOU BE ONE OF THOSE

who were doomed to go through life alone, without the joys and happiness that go hand in hand with a loving wife and strong, healthy children? Would the fact that you have neglected your body, ignored the fundamental principles of health and right living, and failed to make the most of Nature's supreme gift, doom you to a life of single wretchedness and unhappiness?

Our first duty is to posterity. We are not put here by an all-wise Providence merely to live out our lives and then go out, like a snuffed candle. We are entrusted with the sacred duty of perpetuating the species, a duty which is as sacred and immutable as anything might well be.

LIKE BEGETS LIKE is a saying handed down from time immemorial, and no truer maxim has ever fallen from the lips of man. A thin, scraggy, underdeveloped body, soaked and saturated with poisons which are denied their proper outlet because of functional inefficiency cannot hope to produce strong, healthy children. A man who is torn and wrecked by physical ailments, organic disorders and excesses of all kinds, will some day be treated to the spectacle of his children in a like condition. On the other hand, the strong, healthy, virile man, with a body and constitution that is a replica of Nature's own design, and who jealously safeguards that body and that health, and takes the proper measures to gain and keep them, will some day revel in the sight of offspring that are but a duplicate of himself—a picture of joyous, bubbling, care-free health and strength.

So you see, it is not only yourself to whom YOU OWE A DEBT, but TO ALL MANKIND.

AND YOU OWE IT MOST TO THAT GIRL

The sweetest, purest, dearest girl in all the world, whom you would call wife. Is your body clean, strong and healthy? Do you realize the terrible consequences of the follies that are wrecking your body? Remember, then, that STRONGFORTISM will restore to you the vitality of MANHOOD.

If you have any of the troubles mentioned on the consultation coupon below, check up the subject in which you are interested and mail it to me today with your name and address written plainly thereon.

YOU have the same right to the splendid Health, Virile Manhood, and Superb Body shown in the picture to the left, that I have, if you will obey Nature. If you will do the things I shall ask you to do, you can make your body like mine. I will show you *how* to obtain it.

In order to help you attain that degree of bodily strength and efficiency that is yours by gift of Nature, I invite you to write me regarding your present condition. Do not hesitate to state your case plainly and fully, and no matter whether it is merely lack of proper development, simple indigestion, constipation or the result of youthful excesses, I shall be glad to give you a personal word of advice that will prove of inestimable value.

I have prepared a little book, entitled **"PROMOTION AND CONSERVATION OF HEALTH, STRENGTH AND MENTAL ENERGY,"** which should be read by everyone sufficiently interested in themselves to wish for the best in life. You will find it interesting, and it points the way to better health, a cleaner and happier life, and a splendid physique. Three 2 cent stamps will pay for the postage, etc., on the book. Send for it *now*. You will be pleased and surprised with its contents.

In addition, and in response to numerous requests, I have prepared for the benefit of those who have finished my Conditioning Course of Instructions, my book, "THE STRENGTH OF A HERCULES AND HOW TO OBTAIN IT." This book will be of especial interest to those who are already in possession of a fairly well developed body and who are desirous of acquiring the exceptional physique and maximum of bodily efficiency. As long as the present edition lasts, I shall be glad to forward a copy, if you will but enclose 6 cents in stamps to cover mailing expenses.

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FREE CONSULTATION COUPON

Mr. Lionel Strongfort, Newark, N. J.—Please send me your book, "PROMOTION AND CONSERVATION OF HEALTH, STRENGTH AND MENTAL ENERGY," for postage of which I enclose 6 cents in stamps. I have marked (X) before the subject in which I am interested.

(547)

..Colds
..Catarrh
..Asthma
..Obesity
..Headache
..Thinness
..Rupture
..Lumbago
..Neuritis
..Neuralgia
..Flat Chest
..Deformity (describe)
..Insomnia
..Short Wind
..Flat Feet
..Stomach Disorders
..Constipation
..Biliousness
..Torpid Liver
..Indigestion
..Nervousness
..Poor Memory
..Rheumatism
..Youthful Errors
..Vital Losses
..Impotency
..Gastritis
..Heart Weakness
..Poor Circulation
..Skin Disorders
..Despondency
..Round Shoulders
..Lung Troubles
..Increased Height
..Stoop Shoulders
..Muscular Development
..Great Strength

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We have solved the money problem for Van Gieson, White, Webster, Heath and hundreds of other men. By looking after our new and renewal subscriptions for *Adventure, Everybody's Magazine* and *The Delineator* in their spare time, they earn $45 to $450 a month. You can do the same.

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In the next six months a million orders for these publications will be placed. Thousands will come to us direct, because our staff of local representatives is not large enough to handle all the business.

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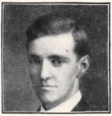
Fred D. Webster of Pennsylvania in odd hours adds $100 to $125 a month to his regular income.



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